CHAPTER 1

WHY SHANE NEVER COMES BACK

Alan Ladd's Face

The thing I remember most about seeing *Shane* as a boy is the face of Alan Ladd. It was the medium close-up shot at the beginning of the movie when he pauses on his horse and looks across the river at the boy on a fence. Shane's gaze is returned not only by the boy but by his parents, particularly the mother, played by Jean Arthur, who is framed by the kitchen window (Ills. 1–2). Ladd's face almost resolves the tensions between the masculine and the feminine that are starkly represented in the film by the contrast between the mother's gentility and rejection of guns and violence, on the one hand, and the rough, brutal faces of the Ryker brothers and their gunslinging cohorts, on the other. Structurally, Shane's face resembles the mother's, though his potential violence aligns him with Ryker. Despite the director's best efforts to make him appear so at times, Alan Ladd was not a towering figure in the tradition of other Western male heroes. If Shane was "not much above medium height" in Jack Schaefer's novel (1975: 2), Ladd was below


ILLUSTRATIONS 1–2 Shane and his mirror image. *Shane* (1953). Paramount Pictures. *Producer and director:* George Stevens *(shot/reverse shot sequence)*

medium height and made for a feminized version of the Western gunfighter.

Shane does not directly represent class division and conflict in the way that some later Westerns, like *Heaven's Gate*, would do. If it had, it probably would not have influenced me or anyone else of the fifties generation in the way it did. It was precisely the focus on the family, even its idealization, that made *Shane* something of an event in my childhood. As I noted earlier, both *Shane* and *Heaven's Gate* derive from the same historical background, which is the Wyoming Johnson County War of 1892. Neither of these films can be said to represent the events of that war accurately, though *Heaven's Gate* achieves some degree of authenticity in imagining the worst scenario for how the war might have gone. *Shane*, by contrast, reduces the conflict between the corporate cattlemen and the homesteaders of Johnson County to a more elementary struggle between a single rancher and a handful of families – between the rugged masculine individual and the more feminized community. There is no suggestion of any serious wrongdoing on the part of the homesteaders, no reference to rustling that was the accusation used by the big cattlemen to justify their invasion of Johnson County with the intent of executing a number of people from 19 to 70, depending on the source of the information (Smith 1966: 194). I will come back to the Johnson County War and its relation to the Western movie tradition throughout this study; but here I want to focus on what distinguishes *Shane* from *Heaven's Gate*, which is the articulation of class struggle through the mediation of the family.

In the areas of feminist and gender studies as well as queer theory, there have been frequent criticisms of essentialism as applied to the categories of gender and sex. According to this logic, whatever the necessary biological preconditions, no one is born a man or a woman, a homosexual or a heterosexual; rather these categories are constructed within a social context, and a subject takes on these identities through a complex process of social articulation or *suturing*. I use the later term not in its strict theoretical sense but rather in a more common-sense way that can still be related to its use in film theory and Lacanian psychoanalysis. To say that a subject must be sutured to an identity is to recognize a process that is not natural and that can never be complete. In the formation of a subject, the suture marks a relation that can always come undone, that breaks any continuity or ground of wholeness, and that must constantly undergo renewal through repetition (Butler 1991: 21). An error that sometimes haunts gender and class analysis is the assumption that a subject is necessarily determined in such a way as to assume a specific social identity such as homosocial masculinity or working-class consciousness. Even though the process of suturing is recognized, there is still the assumption that its outcome is inevitable and that it is added onto a more authentic and ethically legitimate social identity. In order to understand the historical impact of a movie like *Shane*, it is necessary to suspend these assumptions and try to imagine a world in which a subject that has no essential identity struggles to construct itself.

The opening shots of *Shane* illustrate this process. In the first shot after the credits, we see little Joey (Brandon De Wilde) stalking a deer with an unloaded gun. As he aims the gun, he notices (in the subjective reverse shot) Shane riding into the space between the antlers of the deer. The close-up of Joey's face as he concentrates on the distant rider may simply represent a child's curiosity, but these images link that curiosity with the aggressive drive and suggest that the child seeks the answer to a question about his place in the world that he can only formulate indirectly. In effect, Shane's image is what Lacan would call the answer of the real (Žižek 1992: 32). Joey's aggressive game is almost antithetical to the first images of the Starrett farm that immediately follow, images that suggest a natural utopia. Joey disavows his fantasy by running back to the farm where his father is chopping wood while his mother sings in the kitchen. In these opening shots, Joey moves away from the domestic space

and virtually tries to subvert it through the fantasy of killing the deer; then he runs back into that space as if to verify his identification with his father's image and his mother's voice.

The first medium close-up of the father, Joe Starrett (Van Heflin), is at a low angle, which conveys his authority in the eyes of the boy. The father's impersonal gaze at the distant rider lacks the boy's aggressive curiosity. The boy runs to the fence; and then in the next shot the mother, Marian, walks past the kitchen window without looking out. Her singing voice pervades the scene. Joey climbs the fence; and then the camera cuts to a shot from behind the father, which shows him in full stature as he watches Shane nearing the farm in the distance. There is a contrast between the father's immobility and Shane's mobility, between Joe's large size and obvious physical strength and Shane's small size and relative physical weakness. In the next two shots, Shane's approach along the river is contrasted with the image of the mother in the window with her back to the camera. In the following long shot, Shane pulls up to the edge of the river and stops. In close-up, Joey gazes intently at Shane, while in a reverse medium close-up Shane looks back.

Critics and spectators usually assume that the viewpoint of the film more or less corresponds to that of the boy as it did in the novel. In the sequence I just mentioned, this reading is supported by the shot/reverse shot pattern: a close-up of Joey, the reverse shot in medium close-up of Shane, and another close-up of Joey that completes the circuit and would seem to suture the spectator to Joey's viewpoint. The parents reinforce Joey's gaze with their own, and there is no subjective reverse shot that reveals the family from Shane's perspective. In fact, Shane is clearly the object of the gaze and occupies the position that Laura Mulvey (1989: 19) attributes to women in classical Hollywood cinema (see Mitchell 1996: 160–3). Though Shane eventually plays an active role in the narrative of this film, for most of the time he is on the screen he functions as spectacle. In the opening sequence, he brings all narrative activity to a stop as everyone turns to look at him. After he leaves and Ryker and his men arrive, his sudden appearance at the side of the cabin is enough to disrupt Ryker's attempt to intimidate the Starretts. When he goes to town for the first time, he is scrutinized by everyone and is finally subjected to abuse by the cowhand Chris (Ben Johnson). Back at the Starrett place, the local homesteaders meet Shane with

suspicion and then proceed to talk about him in the third person. Marian's look is more compassionate when she watches him through the window of the cabin as he stands in the rain. Even in the scene in which Shane shows Joey how to shoot, the emphasis is on how Shane looks to Joey and Marian rather than on what he can do with a gun. At the Fourth of July celebration, the emphasis is on how Shane looks to Joe as he dances with Marian. Finally, when Shane rides to the final confrontation, the camera focuses from different angles on the spectacular image of the man on a horse with triumphal music in the background. This sequence postpones the inevitable narrative conclusion – the moment when Shane acts – for as long as possible.

In that final ride, Joey's viewpoint seems dominant; but in most of its critical scenes the film articulates multiple viewpoints through complicated crosscutting. However, the dominant though not exclusive viewpoint is the one of which we are least aware, and that is the viewpoint of Shane. If the Starrett farm looks utopian, if the initial compositions and coloring create the feeling of a domestic paradise American-style, complete with home-baked pie, these images of the holy nuclear family reflect the viewpoint of someone on the outside, someone who has not had to "work, work, work," as Marian describes life on the homestead later in the movie. This suggests that the suturing process through which a spectator relates to a movie like *Shane* cannot be reduced exclusively to the configuration of shots in a technical sense. Suture theorists have always privileged the dominant shot/reverse shot structure, though they have also been willing to recognize that suturing is a function of the larger narrative process in cinema (Heath 1981: 19–112; Silverman 1983: 194–236). To that insight, I would add the understanding that spectators exist in history and that the way they insert themselves into the representations of mass culture responds to determinations that come from outside the medium of film itself.

What Shane Wants

Shane is a prototype of the Man with No Name played by Clint Eastwood in Sergio Leone's *Dollars* trilogy. It probably would be more appropriate to refer to this character as the Man with No

History. Ultimately, a man without a history has no real identity because identity is a function of history, of the stories we tell about ourselves, both as individuals and as members of a group. The gunfighter Wilson has an identity because his history precedes him, and even Shane knows about it. But when it comes to Shane, no one seems to know anything for certain. The cowhand who leaves town when he sees Shane can only explain his reaction as a form of superstition. Wilson doesn't know Shane the way Shane knows Wilson. Consequently, Shane is a nomad not only because he is mobile and without a domestic center like Joe Starrett's, but because he has no story that can explain his being.

Freud argued that the goal of life is death; and every individual's concept of his or her own life and its meaning or value is determined by the imagination of the end, of how our history must look from the perspective of our own death. The nomad is the force in every subject that pulls against the process of suturing and destabilizes any fully constituted identity and the determination of a specific end. In the movie, though we don't often see what Shane sees, we identify with the position from which he sees – with the nomadic subject as the condition of our seeing. I would argue that the appeal of cinema is not just that it gives us images that validate the social identities into which we have been born. Rather, it awakens in the spectator the nomad that questions every officially-sanctioned identity in the quest for a history that can resolve the contradictions inherent in his or her immediate social context.

When Shane and Joe work on removing the tree stump, their activity produces figures of labor that suggest Shane's identification with someone who produces value like Joe rather than someone who appropriates the value produced by the labor of others like Ryker. Marian's work in the kitchen and her partnership with Joe make her another figure of value-producing labor. Together they signify the productivity of the family as pure use value that transcends the principles of ownership and the patriarchal authority that defines the institutional structure of property. As a structure of feeling, these images express both Shane's desire to be a man and the force that divides such desire from its goal. He wants the family as use value, which produces affective wealth, but not as an institutional structure that tries to constrain human passions and desires. Joe is not such a high ideal of masculinity that neither the spectator

nor Shane can imagine being able to step into his shoes, but as a patriarchal subject Joe appears to be fixed and immovable like the stump (and it is curious that, even after they have pulled up the stump, it remains in the yard, so that later Shane is driven up against it when he fights Joe for the right to take his place in the gunfight with Ryker and Wilson). Shane has a passion for Joe, but this passion makes it impossible for him to be like Joe. The nomad desires that which he is not, but the condition of that desire is distance from the identity that embodies the history he wants for himself. The object of his passion is never what he wants but the sign of what he wants, the thing that holds the place of desire in the world. It is the sign of something that can't be named but nonetheless conditions his desire and drives him onward toward the end that will make sense out of his quest but is always out of reach. He desires that which enables him to go on desiring, which could be called freedom.

Marian is attracted to Shane because she recognizes in him the nomadic desire that her history with Joe has disavowed but not completely repressed. Marian harbors the knowledge that Joe lacks, the knowledge that her desire exceeds her identity in the family structure. She loves Joe for being what she is not, for lacking the self-consciousness that is the condition of nomadic desire, for being at one with a history that centers on the family and its normalized gender identities. In this context, self-consciousness and the desire that exceeds the norms of patriarchal culture result in a figurative castration – in the feeling of incompleteness, of the necessity and impossibility of desire. Near the end of the movie, when Marian begs Joe to leave the farm and surrender to Ryker, Joe insists that Marian loves their place more than he does; but the truth is that Marian loves Joe's identity and the history it derives from more than she loves the place. She would rather move on and re-create that history than risk it. Marian knows that the land reduced to private property is never the true object of desire but the support of desire. Shane is similarly castrated. He doesn't want Joe's land; he doesn't even want to take Joe's place with Marian: he wants Joe's history. As a man without a history, he wants to protect Joe and his story from the death that Shane himself embodies. Shane desires a history and a story that he can never have because he can never surrender his desire for desire. Neither can Marian. Contrary to what so many

critics have assumed, Shane and Marian are not potential lovers; but they are bound by their mutual passion for Joe as the embodiment of what they are not.

I realize that linking Marian and Shane as castrated subjects must seem counterintuitive and perverse to some readers. Obviously, the term "castrated" is harsh; but I only refer to the fact that as self-conscious desiring subjects, Shane and Marian can never be self-identical and, to that extent, complete in the way that Joe is. Unlike Shane at the beginning and ending of the movie, Joe doesn't wear a six-gun; but he is the symbolic phallus. The phallus in this context refers to the power of a social identity that contains and defines all social desire without allowing for any remainder or excess. The phallic man takes his identity for granted as the natural way of things and assumes that the dominant patriarchal narrative defines his life and its goals as it defines the life and goals of those around him. Still, Joe is not without knowledge of Marian's desire. As he prepares to face Ryker at the movie's climax, he tells Marian that he knows she will be taken care of if he is killed, better than he could himself, even though he has always known he could trust his wife under any circumstance. Structurally, Joe can never admit to the reality of desire. He merely takes it for granted that Shane can and will take his place in the nuclear family, that he will become the man he desires to be (thus putting an end to desire) and take on the function and the name of the father. As a man with only a first name, Shane has no patronymic signifier; and to that extent, he becomes the signifier of a desire for something that has no name. Shane's relation to Joe as the symbolic father is one of passionate ambivalence. Shane can never be Joe or successfully assume the function of the father or bear the name of the father without ceding his own desire, something he will never do. Joe himself has no desire – or rather has ceded his desire to the dominant patriarchal narrative, the "dominant fiction" (Silverman 1992: 30).

Shane and Marian both express ambivalence toward the symbolic phallus, though the spectator must look beyond the dialogue to realize this. Shane's most explicit phallic signifier is his gun. Critics frequently quote Shane's clichéd remark to Marian that "a gun is a tool, as good or bad as the man using it." When he utters these words, Shane looks self-complacent and a little pompous, but Marian retorts without hesitation that she would like to see every gun out

of the valley. When she says this, Shane's complacency is punctured and his face expresses uncertainty and self-doubt, something you would never see in the face of John Wayne, at least not on this issue; but this hardly surprises the spectator who must have noticed Shane's ambivalence toward his weapon throughout the film. In fact, his attitude toward the gun matches his attitude toward Joe, Marian, and the family. He is proud of it and, at the same time, alienated from it. Shane's alienated relation to the family is also made explicit from the moment he contemplates entering their world. The morning after Shane's arrival Joey stumbles into the barn while playing, and encounters Shane. Then he blurts out that his father wants Shane to work for him but not to fight his battles. After the boy leaves, the worried expression on Shane's face conveys both his ambivalence about and attraction to the family. Director George Stevens never shows the moment when Joe formally asks Shane to work for him. Instead, the movie cuts from the worried expression on Shane's face in the barn to a scene that takes place after he has already accepted Joe's job offer. This scene is carefully composed to articulate Shane's new status as someone both inside and outside the family. In a set of shots, the camera is first positioned inside the parents' room and then inside the boy's room so that we see Shane framed by the doorways that constitute a threshold he may not cross. He is in the cabin but excluded from its more intimate space.

The sequence in which Marian watches Shane standing in the rain outside of Joey's bedroom window is one of the few in which we see family members from Shane's viewpoint. The shot/reverse shot structure suggests Shane and Marian's mutual identification with one another. Marian stands at the threshold between a feminine domestic space and the masculine violence of the outside world, but she cannot cross the threshold in order to bring Shane into her world anymore than Shane can cross over into the intimate space of the family. In response to Shane's vague reference to his own past, she says, "I think we know, (*pause*) Shane." The collective pronoun cannot refer to Marian and Joey; and though Joe cannot be utterly naïve about Shane's probable history, he doesn't appreciate, in the way Marian does, the contradictory nature of Shane's desire. Marian's long pause before she utters the name "Shane" signifies her implicit (though not necessarily conscious) understanding of what the name

means: the absent patronymic of the subject without a history – that is to say, without a history to which he can admit and from which he can derive the pleasure of being a subject. The collective pronoun in the phrase "I think we know" ultimately refers to Shane and Marian. They know the truth that would fill the long pause before the utterance of Shane's name. That truth is the desire for desire.

As I suggested earlier, the phallus symbolizes a social identity whose power defines and regulates human desire. In *Shane*, the gun signifies masculine authority based on the use of force. Because Joe has a fully constituted patriarchal identity, he doesn't need a gun because his consciousness is not split and requires no symbolic representation in order to articulate itself. Joe's negative counterpart in the movie is not Shane but Ryker. The latter must carry a gun and hires additional gunmen because his authority has been threatened by Joe and the communal social structure Joe represents. Shane's relation to the gun is conflicted. When he first rides into the valley, there is a contrast in his physical appearance between the plain buckskins and the rather ornamental gun and flamboyant gunbelt. It is as if Shane needs to disavow his own problematic relation to the phallus and thus to masculine social identity. In the fight with Joe before the final showdown, Shane uses the gun to knock his opponent out when he is overpowered by Joe's greater strength. Finally, after the gunfight with the Ryker brothers and Wilson, Shane tells Joey that he has to leave the valley (and, by implication, the family and the social identities that the family encodes) because there is no going back on a killing. In effect, by using the gun, he has cut himself off from the object of his desire and made himself incomplete in relation to the history he has tried to assimilate. Yet Shane's personal failure is a sort of victory; for while he has lost the immediate object of desire, which would be a place in the family and in the history of the family, he continues to pursue or has already achieved the aim of his desire, a meaningful death.

Why Shane Wears a Blue Collar

Shane is symbolically castrated because he is conscious of the split between desire and demand, between the unnamable object of desire that is always out of reach and the immediate and fantastic goal of

demand (McGee 1999: paras. 15–17). In a sense, both Ryker and Joe articulate a demand that is rooted in social fantasy. Both are proponents and defenders of private property as the basis of social relationships, though Joe is clearly the more flexible of the two because he doesn't think of private property as an end in itself but as the means to an end, as the condition of the nuclear family and the basis of community relationships. Joe spells out the difference between Ryker and himself at Tory's funeral: "he only wants to grow his beef and what we want to grow up is families." The family as a natural unit that regulates social desire, however, is itself a fantasy. It is not a fantasy as a social arrangement with pragmatic and emotional values, including erotic ones; but it takes on the structure of fantasy when it is imagined as the natural object and limit of all desire. In the final fight between Joe and Shane, it is the latter's task to challenge Joe's fantasy with force – to bring him to the realization that his social identity as a man and a father is limited. The horses and other farm animals go wild and kick against their pens and corrals because Shane is subverting the "natural" authority of the nuclear family.

Shane identifies with Joe Starrett and his family to such an extent that he puts on the symbolic blue collar and becomes, at least in appearance, a working-class subject, perhaps more than Joe is. It is not that Shane works for wages while Joe owns his property and works for himself, though these are expressions of a social difference. The key distinction is a difference in consciousness, a difference between Shane's alienation from and Joe's identification with the property system. Shane's critique of the property system is expressed by his actions, and it takes the conscious form of his understanding that the conflict between Ryker and the community of homesteaders led by Joe is not based on a disagreement over boundaries or the best method of raising cattle. It is based on the distribution of power and the use of force. For Joe, private property is a natural institution based on human reason; and he imagines that conflicts over property can be resolved through rational discourse that is itself a reflection of human nature. As he says to Ryker's men when they summon him to the final showdown, "I always figured on being reasonable." For Ryker, power and force determine ownership; and though he would prefer to get his way through persuasive words, he does not hesitate to resort to violence as the ultimate basis of social power.

After the homesteaders' Fourth of July celebration, Ryker confronts Joe at his place with a different history and a different understanding of property from the one that Joe has been promoting. Ryker claims that he and men like him "made this country, we found it and we made it. Work, blood, and empty bellies." To Joe's claim that the homesteaders have been in the right all along, Ryker responds by referring to "the men that did the work and ran the risks" by destroying the Indians and the rustlers. Joe responds that other men came to the West before Ryker and did more to tame the country than he did. Historically, Joe is right, though he shows no sympathy for the Native Americans who occupied and used the land before any of these so-called Westerners appeared on the scene. Even more than Ryker does, Joe assumes that the conquest of the West was a form of natural progress. According to Limerick, most Americans still support the view that Joe articulates: "Like the settlers themselves, we steadfastly believe in the social fiction that lines on a map and signatures on a deed legitimately divide the earth" (1987: 56). But Ryker has no intention of accepting such a legal fiction as the true basis of ownership.

Shane embodies the critique of private property and the class system in another sense. When Shane puts on a blue collar to work for Joe Starrett, it is a matter of free choice. Despite the fact that the Western is identified with conservative ideologies of self-making and individualism, this genre rarely supports the ideology of the work ethic (Cawelti 1999: 44, 53). On the contrary, the key to Western figures like Shane is their refusal of work in the ordinary sense of the word – their refusal of wage slavery that would mean the surrender of autonomy in the performance of any creative or transformative activity. Shane and many other Western heroes resemble the figure of the flâneur as it was described by Walter Benjamin in *The Arcades Project*. Though Benjamin's flâneur is the Baudelairean product of urban space and commodity culture, such a figure fits right into the character of the Western drifter for whom the vast expanses of the West constitute a marketplace. For Benjamin, the flâneur expresses contradiction by empathizing with "the soul of the commodity" and presenting himself to the marketplace not as a buyer but as merchandise, even though he controls his comings and goings in relation to buyers (1999: 42, 369). Upon his first appearance in the film, Shane conveys a knowledge of his own commodity

status; and yet, at the same time, he implicitly protests that his price is beyond the governance of the marketplace, beyond the determination of value through comparison with any other commodity. He is a man for sale and in quest of a buyer, though he will never surrender his autonomy to the market and must make the deal on his own terms (10). He materializes the ultimate effect of commodity fetishism through which we imagine that if any commodity could speak it would say, "Buy me! For at any price I'm a bargain since I am unique and beyond value." Still, the significance of the Western flâneur's drifting, which also explains the attraction of the Great Plains as a mythological space in American history, lies in his "unconscious protest against the tempo of the production process" (338).

At the time of its emergence in the nineteenth century as a critical element of the American myth, the figure of the Great Plains signified an alternative to the wage slavery and industrialization of the East. The Western drifter supposedly treasured his idleness and purposeless existence, because, as Benjamin stresses, "The idleness of the flâneur is a demonstration against the division of labor" (427). When Ryker offers Shane a job, he turns it down without a moment's hesitation because, though he seeks the knowledge of his worth, he never accepts that value as his true measure and gives his labor only to the force in society that doesn't threaten his autonomy. When Shane works for Joe, he never plays the role of a subordinate; and at critical moments he takes Joe's place as head of the family and leader of the community. Nonetheless, Shane's natural state is that of creative idleness, of the refusal to work. His image perfectly illustrates what Benjamin calls the "dialectic of flânerie": "on one side, the man who feels himself viewed by all and sundry as a true suspect and, on the other side, the man who is utterly undiscoverable, the hidden man" (420).

Though Shane does not have the wealth of someone like Ryker, he emulates the autonomy and freedom that derives from wealth. His existence is a protest not only against the division of labor that constitutes the class system but against the distribution of wealth that is justified by the argument that those who have wealth have earned it through work. Shane knows implicitly that the basis of Ryker's wealth is not the work he did with other men to clear and tame the wild West but the physical force and political power that enabled him to take the land away from Indians and to defeat

ILLUSTRATION 3 Community in the foreground, power in the background. *Shane* (1953). Paramount Pictures. *Producer and director:* George Stevens

rustling and other forms of class antagonism with a freedom that went beyond any ethical principle of right. Though Shane has rejected the accumulation of wealth as the purpose of life, he has appropriated the condition of wealth through his mastery of the gun. Just as Shane's lifestyle both protests against and mimics that of men like Ryker, his potential violence threatens the class system with possible subversion by the very force that the system itself has created.

As the spokesman for the community, Joe wants to believe that it is law that determines entitlement and not the use of force. Yet the visual composition of the Tory funeral sequence suggests a contradiction between the practices of community and the exercise of power. In the establishing shot, the mourners in the graveyard are formed in a circle in the foreground, while the town in the background belongs to Ryker (Ill. 3); and that includes everything that the town represents to the homesteaders: commodities that enable them to work while providing physical comfort and social pleasure. The values of community and the values of power seem to be mutually exclusive.

Why Shane's Gun Sounds Like an Atom Bomb

Even before the funeral, Joe has been contaminated by Shane's presence just as Shane has been seduced by the fantasy of the nuclear family. The critical turning point for Joe is the fight with Ryker's men in Grafton's saloon after Shane has defeated Chris. In their victory, Shane and Joe have cemented their homosocial bond, but they have also betrayed their ethical identities. Shane has unleashed the destructive power that he apparently wanted to keep under control, while Joe has relied on force rather than reason to solve a problem. Even Marian has betrayed her principles of nonviolence when, after dressing the men's wounds, she says they were both wonderful. Another person has been transformed by the fight in the saloon: the cowboy Chris.

The most homoerotic moment in Schaefer's novel comes after Shane defeats Chris and is overcome by sadness: "He bent and scooped the sprawling figure up in his arms and carried it to one of the other tables. Gently he set it down, the legs falling limp over the edge." He gets a rag from the bar and "tenderly cleared the blood from the face" (1975: 61–2). In the movie, Shane performs none of these actions; yet Chris's transformation is critical to understanding Shane's identity. There are several medium shots of Chris sitting on the porch of the saloon during the Tory funeral sequence; and the expression on his face, especially in contrast with the boastful arrogance of Ryker's other men and Wilson's sadistic leer, suggests that his world has been turned upside down. Chris has become an alienated figure like Shane. This means that he no longer knows who he is or what the object of his desire is. Before his encounter with Shane, Chris was presumably confident in his masculine identity and had subordinated his desire to the social values of Ryker. He accepted without question the fantasy of power as an end in itself and, more specifically, Ryker's belief in his own physical force as the moral justification of his right to superfluous wealth. Chris associated the willingness to use physical force with masculinity and the right to private property. After he suffers defeat, he has no choice but to rethink his social identity. When Chris rides out to the Starrett place in order to warn Shane of Ryker's treacherous intention toward Joe, he can only explain his turnaround with the phrase, "I reckon somethin's come over me." Ironically, in this

scenario, the spectator gets a glimpse of what Shane's own history must have been. While it seems unlikely that Shane ever led a life similar to that of Joe Starrett, he may have been a man like Chris, a gunman for hire to someone like Ryker, a servant to power and property. Something brought about a change, and more than likely it was an act of violence that disrupted Shane's perception of himself and the world.

The image of violence as socially transformative is not unique to the Western. Historically, as Richard Slotkin notes, violence has played a significant role in the US national ideology, particularly through the Myth of the Frontier:

> In each stage of its development, the Myth of the Frontier relates the achievement of "progress" to a particular form or scenario of violent action. "Progress" itself was defined in different ways: the Puritan colonists emphasized the achievement of spiritual regeneration through frontier adventure; Jeffersonians (and later, the disciples of Turner's "Frontier Thesis") saw the frontier settlement as a re-enactment and democratic renewal of the original "social contract"; while Jacksonian Americans saw the conquest of the Frontier as a means to the regeneration of personal fortunes and/or of patriotic vigor and virtue. But in each case, the Myth represented the redemption of American spirit or fortune as something to be achieved by playing through a scenario of separation, temporary regression to a more primitive or "natural" state, and *regeneration through violence*. (1992: 11–12)

In another context, Slotkin notes that "while the rhetoric we will be studying [that of the Frontier Thesis] is brimful of proposals for genocide and wars of extermination, there is in fact nothing exceptional about our history of violence." Just as our economic history belongs to "the larger patterns of western capitalism," our history of violence can be assimilated to "the general system of European expansion" (1985: 61). I would push this logic one step further, though this step is already implicit in many of Slotkin's readings of twentieth-century Western movies. If violence is the figure of social regeneration in American ideology and myth, it is also the figure of social resistance in the counternarratives of that myth.

In part, such a figure of revolt responds to the facts of social history. However effective the ideology and myths of the nation may be in governing the majority of the people through consensus,

these hegemonic narratives are ultimately backed up by force. In the history of the United States, Native Americans, African Americans, women, gay people, the working class and other so-called minorities have learned that their efforts to transform their social and economic situations are usually met with violence and are perceived as violent. The classic example of violent resistance, as Slotkin demonstrates, is that of Native Americans. It can hardly be surprising that the original inhabitants of the North American continent would respond with violence to their conquest by the white settlers who claimed the "New World" as their own. Yet it is remarkable to what extent the concept of Indian or "savage" war came to dominate representations of class struggle, racial conflict, and gender divisions in this country. The evidence for this lies in all three volumes of Slotkin's masterful work on the Myth of the Frontier (1973, 1985, 1992). Though the Civil Rights Movement was remarkably nonviolent by comparison with other revolutions and revolts, it was nonetheless perceived by the supporters of the status quo and racial segregation as violent in its threat to social order. Typically, the violence of the state and the community against nonviolent or minimally violent protest is blamed on the victims. From the suffragettes and union organizers of the early twentieth century to the African-American, Gay Liberation, and antiglobalization protesters of more recent times, the victims of social oppression who challenge their oppressors are usually subjected to and identified with violence.

At the end of *Shane*, the violence unleashed in Shane has transformed everyone it touches. Chris leaves Ryker and becomes a wandering loner like Shane. Ryker, his brother, and Wilson are dead because the social order they embody has lived too long. Joe has been changed by his fight with Shane, though the spectator never sees the result of that transformation. The last image of Joe in the film is that of a defeated man reduced to almost infantile dependency on the woman who supports him. To some extent, this manifests Joe's necessary feminization, or rather the feminization of the patriarchal values that have guided him in his conflict with Ryker. Joe has put property and masculine identity above his concrete social ties. It is not only that he mistakenly thinks he can challenge Ryker's force or naively assumes that Shane can take his place in the family. Rather, he is willing to sacrifice his life for property as an abstraction and implicitly makes the family as a set of

concrete social relationships into an abstraction of itself, into the nuclear family as an idealized model of natural social organization. When Marian tries to persuade him not to face Ryker because she's tired of "work, work, work," he says that "even if that was the truth, it wouldn't change things." As Countryman and von Heussen-Countryman have noted, this negation of his wife's labor and desire is "chilling" (1999: 64). Joe thinks he can transfer his family as property to Shane, but Shane knows that his own violence and alienated desire make that impossible. It has been noted before that the Starretts constitute a holy family as the names of the parents indicate: Joe for Joseph, Marian for Mary. Little Joey is not exactly Jesus; but at the end of the movie he could be said to have two fathers, one for this world and another for the world that lies in or beyond death.

In the long ride to town with its triumphal music, Shane has been transformed into a godlike figure; and little Joey has never been more in awe of his power. In this sequence, more than any other since the opening shots of the film, the spectator sees Shane from Joey's viewpoint. Even in the mobile low-angle front shots of his ride into town, he appears to the spectator as he must appear to Joey's imagination. These images (which will later inspire Clint Eastwood) transform Shane into the embodiment of a law that transcends human institutions and into the violent instrument of divine providence. The destruction he visits on Ryker and his men is performed with surgical skill; and were it not for the implication that Shane has been shot himself, perhaps fatally, there would be little in these scenes to suggest that he is a mortal human being (Ill. 4). In this context, Joey functions as the allegorical embodiment of a generation of young boys who have been imprinted with this phantasmic idealization of masculine identity and violence.

Though the idealization of masculinity that Shane signifies is pervasive, it is nonetheless ambivalent. As I have tried to suggest throughout this analysis, it is the manifestation of a contradiction. Shane can be read as the ultimate Cold Warrior who is the final line of defense against communism, with the Ryker brothers representing the communist totalitarians and their range war the authoritarian state's threat to hard-working entrepreneurs who believe in private property (see Corkin 2004: 127–63). This reading is certainly possible and may be close to the "dominant fiction" of post-World-

ILLUSTRATION 4 Immortal mortality. *Shane* (1953). Paramount Pictures. *Producer and director:* George Stevens

War-II America. When Shane or anyone else fires a gun in this movie, it sounds like the roar of a nuclear blast; and nuclear tests were among the signature events of the fifties. Shane may be the embodiment of the theory of nuclear deterrence; but if he is, he also signifies US society's fear of its own defense and of the men who transformed themselves into the agents of state violence. In the end, he cannot be part of the world he has made possible through his violence. The men like Joe who remain behind as the real fathers of a generation of Joeys must undergo a process of feminization by embracing the values that historically have been associated with women: peaceful coexistence in the community and domestic harmony in the family. Still, such a message cannot interpellate every constituent of mass culture without interference from different class positions and identities. Class itself is the structural violence of the capitalist social system that Shane cannot transcend, even in death. At once, it makes his coming back impossible and inevitable.