





WESTERN WITHOUT AMERICANS (2015)

by Ginette Vincendeau

This essay contains significant plot spoilers.

At once loving tribute, pastiche and deconstruction of the American Western, *Cemetery Without Crosses* re-emerges today after decades of relative obscurity. Robert Hossein shot the film – in which he also stars – in 1968 at the height of the European Western craze. The same year Sergio Leone was making *Once Upon a Time in the West*, following his celebrated 'Dollars trilogy' (*A Fistful of Dollars*, 1964; *For a Few Dollars More*, 1965 and *The Good, the Bad and the Ugly*, 1966), while Edward Dmytryk was directing *Shalako* with Sean Connery and Brigitte Bardot. All these, and many others, were shot in the arid landscape of Almeria in the Andalucía province of Southern Spain.

Although *Cemetery Without Crosses* did respectable business when it was released in February 1969 (attracting almost 1m spectators in France), it left hardly a mark on film history, whether as a French production or as a Western. Books and dictionaries on the genre mostly ignore it and Alex Cox's jokey moniker 'Baguette Western' hardly has the popular ring of the 'Spaghetti' variety. Nevertheless, *Cemetery Without Crosses* is a credible Western, whatever purists might think, and in many ways it is also a very French film.

DECONSTRUCTING THE AMERICAN WESTERN

As its original French title – *Une Corde un colt...* ('A Rope, a Colt') – indicates, Hossein's film is aware of its status as a Western, a genre defined perhaps more than any other by its iconography. The film opens, in black and white, with a group of cowboys riding on horseback at high speed amid clouds of dust, in hot pursuit of three riders. As the credits roll, a typical Western song begins, sung in English by

Scott Walker: 'The Rope and the Colt' however was written, like the rest of the film's music, by Hossein's father, the composer André Hossein. As credits and song end, the screen turns to colour. Two of the fleeing riders drift off; the camera tracks the third to an isolated farm where he falls from his horse, wounded. His pursuers follow and promptly hang him in front of his horrified wife, Maria Caine (Michèle Mercier). From then on *Cemetery Without Crosses* unfolds as a classic revenge drama: Maria hires lone gunfighter Manuel (Robert Hossein) to avenge the death of her husband, Ben (Benito Stefanelli), the victim of the Rogers clan. He reluctantly agrees, contrives to get hired by the Rogers and abducts the patriarch's daughter, Johanna (Anne-Marie Balin), who is later raped by Ben's brothers, Thomas (Guido Lollobrigida²) and Eli (Michel Lemoine) Caine. In retaliation the Rogers leave a battered – and no doubt raped – Maria to die in Manuel's arms. In the final shoot-out, Manuel guns down the Rogers father and his three sons but is shot in turn by Johanna. As he falls to the ground, the image goes back to black and white.

For a long time the critical consensus was that European — predominantly Italian — Westerns were inauthentic copies of American films. But writers like Christopher Frayling³ have successfully argued for them to be seen as variations on the genre (from hybrids to pastiche) that, while never denying the Western's American roots, are legitimate films that should be seen on their own terms. *Cemetery Without Crosses* is no exception. Although he was making his first Western, Hossein amply demonstrates his knowledge of the visual grammar of the genre: the isolated farmstead, the ranch, the ghost town in the deserted landscape, the rowdy saloon bar, the sheriff's jail, the gunfights and the pursuits on horseback are all familiar motifs of the 'Wild West' whose depiction here would not disgrace a US production. Similarly, costumes follow the accepted conventions, although the women's hair and make-up are more 1960s than 1860s. At the same time *Cemetery Without Crosses* embroiders on this basic canvas in ways that are unmistakably European.

^{2 -} Credited as Lee Burton.

^{3 -} See in particular Christopher Frayling, *Spaghetti Westerns, Cowboys and Europeans from Karl May to Sergio Leone* (London: Routledge & Keagan Paul, 1981); Dimitris Eleftheriotis, 'Genre Criticism and the Spaghetti Western', in *Popular Cinemas* of Europe (New York: Continuum 2001); Philippe Ortoli, 'Le crépuscule des icônes', *Positif*, July 2003, pp. 66-67.

^{1 -} Alex Cox, 'Allez Ouest!', Film Comment, November 2008, p. 8.



A post-credit title dedicates the film to "l'amico Sergio Leone". The Italian director was in Almeria filming Once Upon a Time in the West, in which Hossein had been slated to play the sheriff only to be prevented by his contract with Gaumont. For fun. Leone shot the meal scene, the only moment of comic relief in the film; tensely observed by the Rogers clan. Manuel picks up a mustard pot from which a puppet violently erupts, to general hilarity. Besides Leone's symbolic aura, and the presence of several Italian actors as befits a Franco-Italian co-production⁴, other textual elements point to the Italian legacy in Hossein's fetishizing of the Western. As Maria's carriage becomes visible in the distance, Manuel's leg appears in huge close-up, with leather boot and spur. Hossein's incarnation is in a direct line from dozens of such figures in American Westerns, but clearly via Eastwood's 'Man with No Name' - the hat, the cigar, the laconic presence and brooding aura: "I am from elsewhere," he says to Will Rogers, the patriarch of the rival family, played by Daniele Vargas⁵. As opposed to the epic dimension of the classic American Western, the European Western tends to be smaller-scale, to focus on detail, on extreme close-ups and self-conscious camerawork and editing. As Richard Dver says, "Western heroes everywhere win shoot-outs thanks to editing, but in Spaghetti Westerns the editing itself constitutes the excitement." Thus Manuel's final rubbing out of the Rogers is nothing short of magic. And strikingly, the ghost town that rises from the sandy desert (built on shifting sand, it reportedly vanished of its own accord after the shoot⁷), resembles nothing more than what it is, a film set, in which the facades hide nothing but wind and sand and an empty saloon in which Manuel plays a desultory game of roulette or shoots at bottles that resemble a Giorgio Morandi painting.

Perhaps most European, or French, in *Cemetery Without Crosses* is the bleak pessimism that permeates the film. Even granted the tendency for Spaghetti Westerns to focus on low ethics, venality and cruelty, Hossein's narrative paints a particularly dark picture. This is, at times, lifted to the level of tragedy, with Maria's Antigone-like

4 - Although Dario Argento appears on some versions of the film credits, Hossein insists he had nothing to do with the film (his name does not feature on the French credits).

insistence on a public burial for her husband; but mostly it borders on nihilism. Ben was killed because he and his brothers had stolen money from the Rogers gang and killed one of them; Maria then uses Ben's share of the profits to get Manuel to pay them back. The repeated mirroring effect between the two camps is reinforced by the exchange and treatment of women. The Rogers and the Caines ultimately use similar methods, each abusing a woman from the other camp. Manuel stands apart, yet he knowingly lets the Caine brothers rape Johanna. Similarly, though he acts out of love for Maria, he accepts her money. Meanwhile, the sheriff is in the pay of the Rogers. This is not good versus evil, but shades of badness.

Like Jean-Pierre Melville and his sombre gangster films made in the same period (*Le Samourai* in 1967, *Le Cercle rouge* in 1969), Hossein appears as a French filmmaker appropriating an American genre and pushing it to the limits, through pared-down *mise-en-scène*, pessimism and gratuitous gestures, such as Manuel repeatedly pulling a black leather glove on one hand and shooting from the other. As in Melville's films, all concerned die, pointing to the futility of action and justifying the opinion in *Le Monde* that "[s]cheming alternates with violence, and death is the only winner in this dubious combat". It is possible to see these films' recycling of past and "foreign' mythologies, their deployment of violence, including against women, as reacting to the changing context of late 1960s France: between the film's shooting in early spring 1968 and its release in February 1969, the events of May '68 had paralysed the country, brought down General de Gaulle and launched huge cultural change. But notwithstanding this turbulent background, the appeal of Hossein's film at home was also linked to its two lead stars and their strong on-screen chemistry.

HOSSEIN AND MERCIER: A STAR COUPLE

While less known internationally, Hossein and Mercier were major stars in late 1960s France, both separately and together, helping to explain the domestic box-office

^{5 -} Credited as Daniel Vargas

^{6 -} Richard Dyer, Pastiche (London, New York: Routledge, 2006), p. 105.

^{7 -} Alex Cox, 'Allez Ouest!', Film Comment, op. cit.

^{8 -} Jean de Baroncelli, 'Une corde ... un colt', Le Monde, 24 February 1969.

^{9 -} Michèle Mercier, Angéliquement vôtre (Cannes: Delerins, 1996), p. 199.



success of the film. Indeed, Mercier writes in her memoirs that it was on the strength of their pairing that the producers reluctantly agreed to finance the film.⁹

Robert Hossein was born in Paris in 1927. He trained in the theatre and ran parallel careers on stage and in film from early on. It is clear from his autobiography¹⁰ that he considers himself a person of the theatre first, and indeed he staged and acted in many prominent plays. It is, however, the cinema that, in the first instance, gave him visibility. Starting with the role of a drug-addict hoodlum in Jules Dassin's *Riffifi (Du riffif chez les hommes*, 1955), he went on to play many parts that used his dark good looks to elicit an aura of eroticism tinged with danger, for instance opposite Brigitte Bardot in *Love on a Pillow (Le Repos du guerrier*, 1962). He made his directorial debut in 1955 with the 'scandalous' violent thriller *Les Salauds vont en enferl Bastards Go to Hell.* On and off he would direct 17 films, amongst them two Westerns and several crime thrillers including *The Secret Killer (Le Vampire de Düsseldorf*, 1965), about a serial killer. While he complained about being typecast as a hoodlum, there is a certain consistency both in his screen roles and in the films he directed, prompting the critical opinion that, "from film to film, [he kept] searching for the same strange, violent, erotic climate, the same malaise, often enhanced by the music of his father." ¹¹

In contrast to Hossein's roots in the theatre and music, Michèle Mercier (born in Nice in 1939) started out as a dancer. She was discovered by the director Léonide Moguy, who appropriately gave the 18-year-old the lead in 1957's *Give Me My Chance* (*Donnez-moi ma chance*), a film about a young woman's dream of becoming a film star. Yet ironically this particular chance did not lead to stardom, and it was more than 20 films later that she finally struck gold with *Angélique (Angélique Marquise des Anges*) in 1964. Based on a popular novel, this is a historical romance set in the time of Louis XIV, in which she is paired with Hossein as the older, louche aristocratic husband forced upon her whom she ends up falling in love with. The film was a huge hit, generating four sequels between 1964 and 1968, three of them with Hossein.

Despite the different genres, and the fact that Hossein offered her the part as a means of escape from *Angélique* typecasting, there are continuities in the Hossein-Mercier couple between the *Angélique* films and *Cemetery Without Crosses*. Their pairing is an archetypal one: Hossein as the 'dark handsome stranger' of romantic fiction with erotic (and social) power over a much younger woman whose innocence is crossed with spirit and inner strength – one thinks of Rochester and Jane in *Jane Eyre*, or Rhett Butler and Scarlett O'Hara in *Gone with the Wind*. In *Cemetery Without Crosses* Maria dons the widow's black veil from the beginning and instigates the revenge against the Rogers family, but she needs Manuel's help. Their reciprocal desire, mostly conveyed through meaningful glances underlined by Spanish-sounding music, is all the more romantic for being suppressed until the very end of the film.

Cemetery Without Crosses may have been ignored by critics but its stars and director made it a big deal in the French cinema of the time — the trade newspaper Le Film Français, aware that the film was part of an important international trend, featured its shooting on the cover of its 17 March 1968 issue. Mercier's career sadly went into decline after the Angélique saga, but Hossein's continued to blossom. He spent the 1970s working in the theatre and returned to film in the 1980s, directing among other things a successful version of Les Misérables in 1982. The re-release of Cemetery Without Crosses enables us to piece together a more inclusive history of popular French cinema, showing that there are still many hidden gems to be discovered and celebrated.

Ginette Vincendeau is Professor of Film Studies at King's College London and she writes for Sight and Sound. Among her books are Stars and Stardom in French Cinema (2000), Jean-Pierre Melville, an American in Paris (2003), La Haine (2005) and Brigitte Bardot. The Life, The Legend. The Movies (2014).

^{10 -} Robert Hossein, Nomade sans tribu (Paris: Fayard, 1981).

^{11 -} Jean-Loup Passek (ed.), Dictionnaire Larousse du cinéma (Paris: Larousse, 1995), p. 1082.



THE MOVIEGOING SCOTT WALKER

by Rob Young

Few pop stars of the late sixties love the movies like Scott Walker. Ever since the singer and songwriter arrived in London from California in 1965 to construct a pop career, cinematic influences kept cropping up in his work and interviews. There was a widescreen ravishment in the sonic canvases he constructed for his group The Walker Brothers (none of them real brothers, and none originally named Walker), in thickly orchestrated hits such as 'The Sun Ain't Gonna Shine Anymore' and 'My Ship Is Comin' In', and there was a seriousness to his directors of choice — Ingmar Bergman, Michelangelo Antonioni, Luchino Visconti. On his 1969 solo album *Scott* 4, he included a song called 'The Seventh Seal', directly referencing the fatal chess sequence in Bergman's movie.

These early years of Walker's career are marked by the peculiar disconnect of a reluctant talent with screen idol good looks who was shy and damaged by excessive fandom; the successful pop singer who aspired to capital-A Art. In the late sixties, when all these possibilities were potentially open to him, he split from The Walker Brothers at the height of their fame and embarked on a series of solo albums, *Scott* 1–4 (1967–69), on which he developed and extended his talents as a songwriter, arranger, lyricist and vocalist.

Those albums, plus the underrated 'Til the Band Comes In (1970), form the first major peak in Walker's eccentric career path. Received opinion tends to sideline much of the work he produced for the remainder of the 1970s, until the extraordinary reinvention as a creator of avant-garde rock with a nod to contemporary composition which began with 1984's Climate of Hunter and continued through the 1990s to the present. The albums he has produced, slowly but doggedly, from Tilt (1995) to his collaboration with US drone rockers Sunn 0))), Soused (2014), have become incrementally more disturbing, nerve-jangling and lyrically obscure. Yet this late 'black period' has now

gone on far too long to be dismissed as a weird aberration in the old age of a former pop deity. What's interesting now is to see the faint pre-echoes of his current concerns in the music he made while still in his twenties and early thirties.

In this light, it's easy to see how a film like Cemetery Without Crosses (1969), as it came to be known, would appeal to Scott Walker's sensibility. For an expat who has very rarely revisited his American homeland since leaving in 1965, the mythology and savagery of the Wild West frontier has appeared obliquely in some of his music ever after. Not only in the AOR country rock stylings of mid-seventies potboilers like Any Day Now. Stretch (both 1973) and We Had It All (1974), but in the primeval prairies of America evoked in tracks like 'Rawhide' (1984), 'Tilt' (1995) and 'Buzzers' (2006), The movie's only-the-strong-survive ethics, stark and forbidding landscapes, and unflinching portraval of violent coercion and brutal punishment, resemble many of Walker's late-period songs, from the political torture scenes of 'The Electrician' (1978) to Benito Mussolini's pummelled corpse in 'Clara' (2006). Walker's late style seethes with the kind of grisly beatings, rape and lynchings we see in Hossein's film, and in the recent 'Brando' from *Soused*, he catalogues scenes from various Marlon Brando movies in which the actor – one of Walker's favourites – gets beaten up, whipped or generally slapped about. Anyone who can open as hair-raisingly as "Polish the fork and stick the fork in him" ('Buzzers') is clearly preoccupied with the banality of cruelty. At the same time, one of the Western's themes – the breaking up of a local tyranny, in the shape of the Rogers family – is echoed in Walker's obsessive focus on dead dictators, from Stalin on 'The Old Man's Back Again (Dedicated to the Neo-Stalinist Regime)', on *Scott 4* to the aforementioned Mussolini and Nicola Ceausescu (in 'The Day the "Conducator" Died (An Xmas Song)' from Bish Bosch, 2013), There's even a parallel in the extended wordless sequences in Cemetery Without Crosses. Walker was a notoriously taciturn type even in 1967, and increasingly has rarely granted interviews unless attached to a specific new release – he seems to take no pleasure or comfort in the process of promoting his own work. Many of his songs feature harsh dropouts into silence, or extended passages of ominous rumbling from strings, synthesizers of electric guitar.

'Death could strike with a frightening jolt of a lightning bolt in the land where the rope and the colt are king.'

The song 'The Rope and the Colt', used as the opening and closing theme of Hossein's film and appearing in various instrumental variations – electric guitar, male chorus - has a curious backstory. Both its composer and lyricist had unusual, displaced backgrounds; an Iranian relocated to France, and a Jewish British-Polish immigrant brought up near Cape Town. The composer, André Hossein, was director Robert Hossein's father, an Iranian/Persian by birth, and a fascinating figure in his own right. Born in 1905 to a woman from Samarkand, Uzbekistan, and an Azerbaijani merchant, André left Persia and studied music in Moscow, Stuttgart and Berlin, where he took lessons with the legendary pianist Artur Schnabel. After settling in France in 1927, his ambitions as a young composer leaned towards work in a contemporary classical mode – he produced ballets, piano études and concertos, and orchestral work including the ambitious 1947 Symphony of Persepolis, evocatively subtitled The Rubble of the Forgotten Empire. His native Persian remained a crucial influence – as well as being a virtuoso of the Persian tar, he adopted the ancient Zoroastrian faith and much of his later music was inspired by the mythology, folklore and philosophy of the Fertile Crescent, Later in life he composed around twenty film scores, including several for his son's movies. The music for Cemetery Without Crosses is clearly indebted to the Spaghetti Western music of Ennio Morricone in tone and texture, but the melody and pace combine with Walker's delivery in a pounding inexorability that gallops along like the dusty hooves of the opening frames.

Hal Shaper, who supplied the lyrics, arrived in London via California, where he wrote songs for Frank Sinatra, Elvis Presley, Lena Horne and Bobby Darin, after a childhood as the son of Jewish immigrants in South Africa. By 1967 he had infiltrated London's Denmark Street, working with Matt Monro among others. Walker, in some respects a young, existentialist inversion of Monro's showbiz persona, would later record Shaper's 'I Still See You', the theme tune to Joseph Losey's 1971 adaptation of *The Go-Between*.

Franz accompanied Walker to Paris in December 1967 to record their first

collaboration, 'The Rope and the Colt', which was released as a single the following year, with Hossein's 'Concerto for Guitar (Love Scene)' as its B side. The process was smooth, as Franz later told Walker's biographers: "It was not only a very complex song but a very good one. I admired Scott's voice and thought I would give him a break because it was a move away from pop. He did an excellent job and was as professional as anyone could wish for, as well as being great company." (Mike Watkinson and Pete Anderson, *Scott Walker: A Deeper Shade of Blue*, 1994). Around the same time, Walker had been working on *Scott 3* and living between two homes: a flat near Regent's Park in London, and close to his wife Mette's family in Copenhagen, Denmark. Walker's distance from the land of his birth, and the cosmopolitan life he had made for himself in Europe, mirrored the multinational backgrounds of Shaper and Hossein.

'The Rope and the Colt' was the Scott Walker's first soundtrack commission, but the cinema has never been far from his creative process – indeed, his 1972 LP The Moviegoer was a tribute to various songs from contemporary movies. More recently. during the period in which he is commonly supposed to have been 'reclusive', he has recorded Bob Dylan's 'I Threw It All Away' on To Have and To Hold (John Hillcoat, 1996), 'Only Myself to Blame' for the James Bond film The World is Not Enough (Michael Apted, 1999), and composed an original soundtrack for Leos Carax's Pola X (1999). But beyond these commissions, the music he has gone on to make as his own could readily be described as having tendencies recognisable as cinematic, full of jump-cuts, rapid scene-shifts, Foley-style sound effects, zooms in and out on detail and wider frames, even a Lynchian sense of the grotesque and uncanny. The Rope and the Colt, or Cemetery Without Crosses, may at root be a genre piece, but its sheer harshness and the extremity of its silent passages - not to mention the irruption of bizarre humour on the notorious dinner scene – are all features readily identifiable in the music Walker has gone on to make in later life. In fact, the line in 'The Rope and the Colt', 'The days are dust and the nights are black', could have been made to describe the moral and sonic world of late Scott Walker.

Rob Young is a music, film and art author and critic. He is a contributing editor to The Wire and writes for Sight & Sound, Uncut, Frieze, Artforum and others. His books include Electric Eden: Unearthing Britain's Visionary Music (2010) and No Regrets: Writing on Scott Walker (2012)

ABOUT THE RESTORATION

Cemetery Without Crosses has been exclusively restored in 2K resolution for this release by Arrow Films and is presented in its original aspect ratio of 1.66:1 with mono sound.

A 35mm Internegative was scanned in 2K resolution on a pin-registered Arriscan at Immagine Ritrovata, Bologna. The film was graded on the Baselight grading system at Deluxe Restoration, London.

Thousands of instances of dirt, debris and light scratches were removed through a combination of digital restoration tools. Overall image stability was also improved. As the original negative for *Cemetery Without Crosses* was deemed to be in too damaged a state to use as a restoration source and no other intermediary lab elements could be found, efforts were made to attain the highest quality results from the Internegative source. Unfortunately this element suffered from occasional damage in the form of density fluctuation, scratches and debris, and instances of chemical stain and this new presentation exhibits occasional instances of this damage, in keeping with the material's condition. This is especially evident in the initial black and white opening sequence, where scratches and dirt are still prominent.

The film's mono soundtracks were transferred from the original optical sound negatives at Immagine Ritrovata, Bologna. The soundtracks were restored and conformed by David Mackenzie. Some minor instances of noise still remain, in keeping with the condition of the materials.

There are times in which the film's audio synch will appear slightly loose against the picture, due to the fact that the soundtrack was recorded entirely in post-production.

This is correct and as per the original theatrical release.

Restoration Supervised by James White, Arrow Films

Scanning and audio transfer services by Immagine Ritrovata, Bologna:
Restoration Department Management Alessia Navantieri, Davide Pozzi
Scanning/Technical Julia Mettenleiter, Caterina Palpacelli, Elena Tammaccaro
Audio Transfer Gilles Barberis

Restoration services by Deluxe Restoration, London:
Baselight colour grading Stephen Bearman
Restoration Department Management Mark Bonnici, Graham Jones
Restoration Department Supervisors Tom Barrett, Clayton Baker
Restoration Technicians Debi Bataller, Dave Burt, Lisa Copson, Tom Wiltshire
Audio Restoration and Conform David Mackenzie

Special Thanks to Barbara Varani/Movietime and Studio Cine, Italy.

PRODUCTION CREDITS

Disc and Booklet Produced by Anthony Nield
Executive Producer Francesco Simeoni
Production Assistants Louise Buckler and Liane Cunje
Technical Producer James White
QC and Proofing Liane Cunje and Anthony Nield
Blu-ray and DVD Mastering David Mackenzie
Subtitling: IBF Digital, day for night*
Artist Sean Phillips
Design Jack Pemberton

SPECIAL THANKS

Alex Agran, Robert Hossein, Sonali Joshi, Sigrid Larsen, Elsa Lonne-Smith, Barbara Varani, Ginette Vincendeau, Jérôme Wybon, Rob Young



