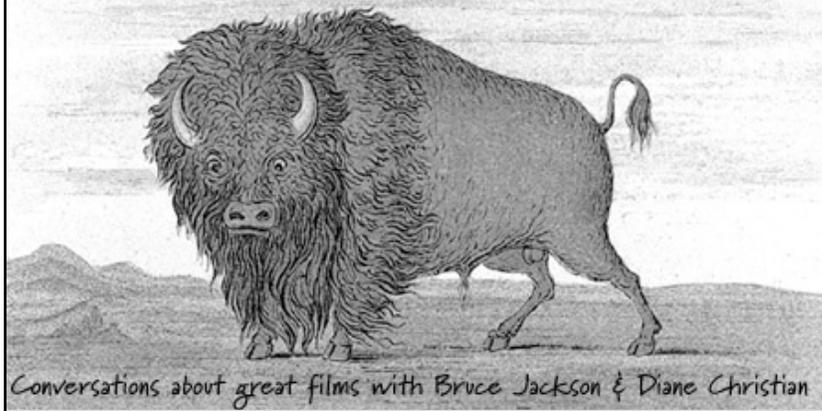
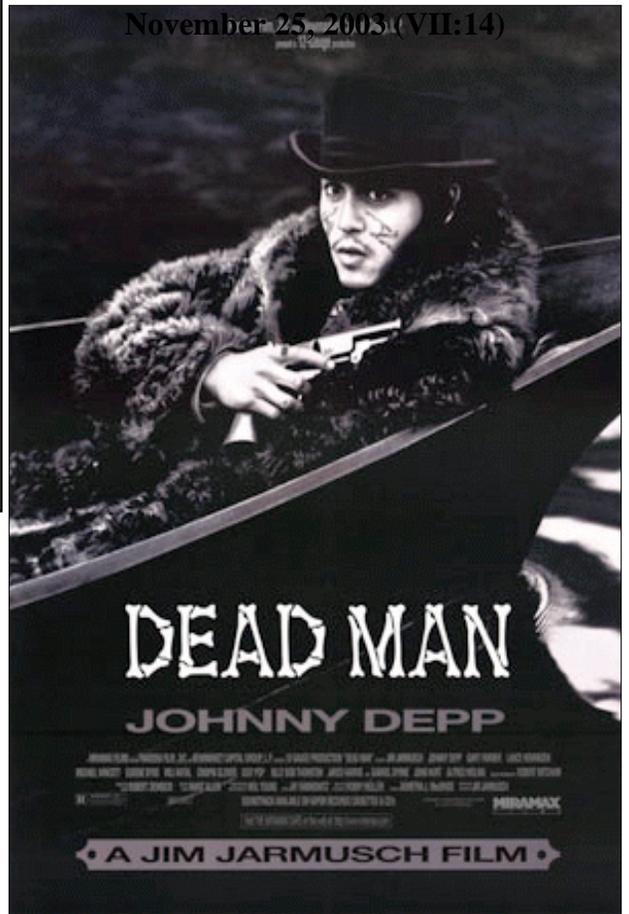


The Buffalo Film Seminars



November 25, 2003 (VII:14)



DEAD MAN 1995 121 minutes

Johnny Depp...William 'Bill' Blake
Gary Farmer...Nobody
Lance Henriksen...Cole Wilson
Michael Wincott...Conway Twill
Mili Avital...Thel Russell
Iggy Pop...Salvatore 'Sally' Jenko
Crispin Glover...Train fireman
Eugene Byrd...Johnny 'The Kid' Pickett
Michelle Thrush...Nobody's girlfriend
Gabriel Byrne...Charles Ludlow 'Charlie' Dickinson
John Hurt...John Scholfield
Alfred Molina...Trading Post missionary
Robert Mitchum...John Dickinson
Billy Bob Thornton...Big George Drakoulous
Steve Buscemi...Bartender

Directed & written by Jim Jarmusch
Produced by Demetra J. MacBride
Original Music by Neil Young
Cinematography by Robby Müller
Film Editing by Jay Rabinowitz
Prosthetics by Richard Alonzo

Jim Jarmusch (22 January 1953, A, *Biography from Leonard Maltin's Movie Encyclopedia*:

"Highly original independent filmmaker who has carved out a niche all his own; Pauline Kael called it the "low-key minimalist comedy about American anomie." Jarmusch studied filmmaking at New York University; his final student project, *Permanent Vacation*

(1980), was seen overseas and greeted with acclaim. His next feature,

Stranger Than Paradise (1984), was expanded from a 30-minute short made two years earlier and followed the marginally comic adventures of a young man, his best friend, and his cousin from Budapest. The film received the Camera d'Or prize at Cannes and was named Best Picture of the year by the National Society of Film Critics. It established Jarmusch's cool, measured style, which looks at America through the eyes of people from foreign lands.

Down by Law (1986) featured Italian comic Roberto Benigni as the outsider, and

Mystery Train (1989) offered a trio of stories about foreigners staying in a Memphis hotel. *Night on Earth* (1991), a five-part story set in five taxis in major cities around the world, is probably his most accessible film to date. In 1993 he won the Palme d'Or at Cannes for his short film *Coffee and Cigarettes Somewhere in California* which featured Tom Waits and Iggy Pop, and directed the Waits video "It's All Right With Me." Some of his other films are *Ghost Dog: The Way of the Samurai* (1999) and *Year of the Horse* (1997).

ROBBY MULLER (4 April 1940, Curaçao, Netherlands Antilles) was also cinematographer for *24 Hour Party People* (2002) *My Brother Tom* (2001), *Dancer in the Dark* (2000), *Ghost Dog: The Way of the Samurai* (1999), *Buena Vista Social Club* (1999) *The Tango Lesson* (1997), *Breaking the Waves* (1996), *Mad Dog and Glory* (1993), *Barfly* (1987), *Down by Law* (1986), *To Live and Die in L.A.*

(1985), *Paris, Texas* (1984), *Repo Man* (1984), and numerous other films.

JOHNNY DEPP (9 June 1963, Owensboro, KY) starred in *Once Upon a Time in Mexico* (2003) *Blow* (2001), *Chocolat* (2000), *The Man Who Cried* (2000), *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas* (1998), *Donnie Brasco* (1997), *Don Juan DeMarco* (1995), *Ed Wood* (1994), *What's Eating Gilbert Grape* (1993), *Edward Scissorhands* (1990), *Cry Baby* (1980), *Platoon* (1986) and *A Nightmare On Elm Street* (1984).

GARY FARMER (12 June 1953, Oshweken, Ontario) appears in three films completed in 2003: *The Big Empty*, *The Republic of Love*, and *Twist*, as well as the tv miniseries "DreamKeeper." Some of his other films are *A Thousand Guns* (2002), *Adaptation*. (2002), *Skins* (2002), *The Score* (2001), *Ghost Dog: The Way of the Samurai* (1999), *Sioux City* (1994), *Still Life* (1988), *The Believers* (1987), and *Police Academy* (1984),

IGGY POP (21 April 1947, Ann Arbor, Michigan), the father of punk rock, appears in *Snow Day* (2000), *The Rugrats Movie* (1998), *The Crow: City of Angels* (1996), *Tank Girl* (1995), *The Color of Money* (1986), and *Sid and Nancy* (1986) and several other films.

ROBERT MITCHUM (6 August 1917, Bridgeport, CT—1 July 1997, Santa Barbara, CA, lung cancer) Bio from IMDB.COM: "Underrated American leading man of enormous ability who sublimates his talents beneath an air of disinterest. Born to a railroad worker who died in a train accident when Robert was two, Mitchum and his siblings (including brother John Mitchum, later also an actor) were raised by his mother and step-father (a British army major) in Connecticut, New York, and Delaware. An early contempt for authority led to discipline problems, and Mitchum spent good portions of his teen years adventuring on the open road. On one of these trips, at the age of 14, he was charged with vagrancy and sentenced to a Georgia chain gang, from which he escaped. Working a wide variety of jobs (including ghostwriter for astrologist Carroll Righter), Mitchum discovered acting in a Long Beach, California amateur theatre company. He worked at Lockheed Aircraft, where job stress caused him to suffer temporary blindness. About this time, he began to obtain small roles in films, appearing in dozens within a very brief time. In 1945, he was cast as Lt. Walker in *The Story of G.I. Joe*, and received an Oscar nomination as Best Supporting Actor. His star ascended rapidly, and he became an icon of Forties film noir, though equally adept at Westerns and romantic dramas. His apparently lazy style and seen-it-all demeanor proved highly attractive to men and women, and by the 1950s he was a true superstar. This despite a brief prison term for marijuana usage in 1949, which seemed to enhance rather than diminish his "bad boy" appeal. Though seemingly dismissive of "art", he worked in tremendously artistically thoughtful projects such as Charles Laughton's *Night of the Hunter*, and even co-wrote and composed an oratorio produced at the Hollywood Bowl by Orson Welles. A master of accents and seemingly unconcerned about his star image, he played in both forgettable and unforgettable films with unswerving nonchalance, leading many to overlook the prodigious talent he can bring to a project which he finds compelling. He moved into television in the Eighties as his film opportunities diminished, winning new fans with "The Winds of War" and "War and Remembrance"." Some of his 130 films: *Cape Fear* (1991), *That Championship Season* (1982), *The Big Sleep* (1978), *The Last Tycoon* (1976), *The Friends of Eddie Coyle* (1973), *Ryan's Daughter* (1970), *The Longest Day* (1962), *Cape Fear* (1962), *Thunder Road* (1958), *Heaven Knows, Mr. Allison* (1957), *Not as a Stranger* (1955), *The Night of the Hunter* (1955), *Track of the Cat* (1954), *River of No Return* (1954), *The Lusty Men* (1952), *The Red Pony* (1949), *Rachel and the Stranger* (1948), *Out of the Past* (1947), *Thirty Seconds Over Tokyo* (1944) and *Hoppy Serves a Writ* (1943). He produced and wrote *Thunder Road* 1958, and wrote the film's song, "Wippoorwill," which became a hit record.

from *The St. James Film Directors Encyclopedia*. Andrew Sarris, Editor. Visible Ink. Detroit 1998 entry by Rob Winning & Rob Edelman:

Jim Jarmusch has risen quickly to the forefront of young, independent American filmmakers.

The focal point of all Jarmusch's work is the apparent contradiction that exists between the popular perception of the American Dream and what that dream actually holds for the individual who doesn't quite fit in. Each of Jarmusch's films is built around a trio of characters, although *Mystery Train* varies that slightly by using three separate stories to explore this central theme. The characters are all off-beat, but all seem to have a vision or aspiration which echoes a popular perception of America. The central characters—Tom Waits' down and out disc jockey in *Down by Law*, or John Lurie's small-time pimp in the same film—are forced to confront their misconceptions and misguided dreams when they are thrown together by fate with a foreigner who views this dream as an observer.

Stylistically, Jarmusch's work echoes the work of the French "New Wave" filmmakers, in particular the Godard of films like *Breathless* and *Weekend*. Jump-cuts are frequently used to disconnect characters from sublime and rational passages of time

and space. A sense of disenfranchisement is created in this way, separating characters from the continuity of space and time which surrounds them.

A product of contemporary American film school savvy, Jarmusch incorporates a sense of film history, style and awareness in his filmmaking approach. The tradition which he has chosen to follow, the one which offers him the most freedom, is that established by filmmakers such as Chabrol, Godard, and Truffaut in the 1950s and 1960s.

from *Dead Man*. Jonathan Rosenbaum. BFI Publishing London 2000

There isn't much agreement about when the post-Western succeeded the Western in American movies. Some might date the end of the traditional Western around 1962, the year in which both *The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance* and *Ride the High Country* appeared; others might think of 1969 (*The Wild Bunch*), 1970 (*Little Big Man* and *El Topo*), 1971 (*McCabe and Mrs. Miller* and *The Last Movie*), 1972 (*Ulzana's Raid*), or 1973 (*Pat Garret and Billy the Kid*).

So it shouldn't be too surprising that a post-Western as important as *Dead Man* had a fairly mixed as well as puzzled

reception in the US when it came out in 1996, among critics as well as general audiences.

After his second feature, *Stranger Than Paradise*, made him an international name, Jarmusch seemed at the height of arthouse fashion.

Consistently rejecting all Hollywood offers... Jarmusch cultivated a stylish international reputation by acting in the films of such friends as Alex Cox, Robert Frank, Raul Ruiz, the Kaurismäki brothers and Billy Bob Thornton—creating a certain model for independence that combined the conviviality of the French New Wave with some of the down-home brashness of storefront theater. The combination of his white hair and his all-black clothes (the latter perhaps an influence of Wim Wenders, one of his early supporters) made him immediately recognisable

This provides one model of American independent filmmaking, but not the one that most of the media are presently preoccupied with. Their model tends to gravitate around the Sundance festival, where success in the independent sector is typically defined as landing a big-time distributor and/or a studio contract—the exposure, in short, that goes hand in glove with dependence on large institutional backing, hence loss of independence. And though it would be wrong to assume that Jarmusch isn't himself dependent on such forces to get his films into theatres (*Dead Man* was distributed in the US by Miramax), the salient difference between him and most other independents is that he's strong enough to afford the luxury of brooking no creative interference when it comes to making production and post-production decisions.

By the time *Dead Man* appeared, the popular notion of American independent film-making had largely shifted from the paradigm represented by Jarmusch to the murkier model of Quentin Tarantino—a film-maker who has never owned the negatives, much less had final cut, on any of his features. The role played by Miramax in this shift is of course crucial, and not only because Miramax has distributed *Dead Man* as well as Tarantino's features, so some consideration of this hands-on distributor and its flair for promotion is crucial to understanding the altered public perception of 'independence'.

Dead Man was trimmed by fourteen minutes after its Cannes premiere—without serious injury, in my opinion—but all of this recutting was done by Jarmusch, without Miramax's input. And despite the expressed desire of Miramax's Harvey Weinstein to make further cuts prior to the film's release, Jarmusch was contractually protected from any such interference. By contrast, Tarantino has welcomed Miramax into his cutting room and relinquished final control over his work for the sake of the distributor's full support. He's even been rewarded for his cooperation with his own distribution subsidiary at Miramax, Rolling Thunder, whose first two releases were *Chungking Express* (1994) and *Switchblade Sisters* (1974).

Jarmusch, on the other hand, appearing at the New York Film Critics Circle's annual awards to accept a prize for Müller's cinematography on *Dead Man*, publicly blamed Miramax for the relatively disappointing performance of *Dead Man* at the box-office, and has implied elsewhere that his refusal to re-edit the film led to a relatively indifferent promotion of the film. (Within my own experience, one prominent programmer planning a Jarmusch retrospective that year told me that, when he requested a print of *Dead Man*, he was informed, 'You don't want to show that, it's a dog'—or words to that effect.)

I would define the political and ideological singularity of *Dead*

as a figure.

Though it's possible to see a director such as Alfred Hitchcock developing certain formal and thematic ideas in his 50s movies, there is little likelihood of such an evolution being possible for a studio director today, what with agent packages, script bids, multiple rewrites, stars who get script approval/and or say over the final cut, test marketing and so on. Within such a context, it's significant that Jarmusch as a writer-director, virtually alone among American independents who make narrative features that get mainstream exposure, owns the negatives of all his films. That means that, for better and for worse, all the developments—and non-developments—that have taken place in his work between *Permanent Vacation* and *Ghost Dog* are of his own making.

Man in two ways: that it is the first Western made by a white film-maker that assumes as well as addresses Native American spectators, and that it offers one of the ugliest portrayals of white American capitalism to be found in American movies.

After showing us New York, Cleveland and rural Florida through the eyes of a Hungarian, Jarmusch then presented New Orleans and the wilds of Louisiana through the eyes of an Italian (Roberto Benigni in *Down by Law*) and Memphis and its rock shrines through the eyes of a Japanese couple (Masatoshi Nagase and Youki Kudo in *Mystery Train*). Two films later, it is Gary Farmer's robust, charismatic Nobody, a Plains Indian who is half Blood and half Blackfoot, who plays the 'foreign' role in *Dead Man*—a fact touching on the scandal that Native Americans are treated in the United States as if they were foreigners. Indeed, *Dead Man* is one of the few Westerns to see through the cheesy mythology—irrational yet implicit in diverse aspects of American life and behaviour—that white people were the first 'real' or 'true' North American settlers, but I hasten to add that its approach to this issue is casual and poetic rather than preachy. The warm, comic friendship between Nobody and Blake, neither of whom entirely understands the other, is central to the film. The immensity of the [Native American Indian] genocide...remains so staggering that it might be said that white racism against Indians, in contrast to racism against Jews, blacks and Asians, has been qualitatively as well as quantitatively different, most of all in the scant degree to which it has been acknowledged.

If America...is haunted by the genocide that presided over its conquest, one thing that makes *Dead Man* a haunted film is a sense of this enormity crawling around its edges, informing every moment and every gesture, without ever quite taking centre stage. This makes it all the more appropriate that its title character is played by Johnny Depp, one of the most haunted beautiful actors in American movies—a presence whose brooding quietness and mystery suggest Buster Keaton.

For even though Depp is called upon to play an archetypal white man with the name of an archetypal English poet, it is worth noting that the actor had a grandfather who was a Cherokee Indian whom he felt very close to as a young child. (He died when Depp was seven, and although of course we never see this in the film, an Indian man with a full head-dress is tattooed on one of Depp's forearms.)

Interview:

ROSENBAUM: A subjective impression I had when I first saw *Dead Man* at Cannes is that it's your first political film. The view of America is a lot darker than in your previous films.

JARMUSCH: I think it *is* a lot darker. You know, you can define everything as being political and analyse it politically. So I don't really know how to respond to that because it wasn't a conscious kind of proselytising. But I'm proud of the film because of the fact that on the surface it's a very simple story and a simple metaphor that the physical life is this journey that we take. And I wanted that simple story, and the relationship between these two guys from different cultures who are both loners and lost and for whatever reasons are completely disoriented from their cultures.

That's the story for me, that's what it's about. But at the same time, unlike my other films, the story invited me to have a lot of other themes that exist peripherally: violence, guns, American history, a sense of place, spirituality, William Blake and poetry, fame, outlaw status—all these things that are certainly part of the fabric of the film, that maybe unfortunately, at least for the distributors, work better when you've seen the film more than once. Because they're subtle and they're not intended to hit you over the head with a sledgehammer.

ROSENBAUM: How long was the rough cut that Neil Young improvised his score to?

JARMUSCH: Two and a half hours. He refused to have the film stop at any moment. He did that three times over a two-day period. Neil asked me to give him a list of places where I wanted music, and he used that as a kind of map, but he was really focused on the film. So the score kind of became his emotional reaction to the movie. Then Neil came to New York to premiss the stuff and we thought in a few places we'd slide it around a little, but it almost never worked—in general it was married to where he played it.

ROSENBAUM: Was your final editing influenced by what he did?

JARMUSCH: No, oddly enough. Or maybe it was, subconsciously. The final movie is two hours long and very little of Neil's music is missing so we didn't cut much where there was music. But it wasn't a conscious decision.

As Jarmusch recalled, Young's own conceptualisation for this [partially improvised score was, "To me, the movie is my rhythm section and I will add a melody to that," and he compared Young's method of performing live to a projection of the two-and-a-half-hour rough cut to the musical accompaniments of silent cinema, though one could also cite the recording of certain improvised jazz scores in the 50s and 60s—most notably the improvisations done for Louis Malle's *Ascenseur pour l'échafaud* (*Frantic*, 1957) by Miles Davis, Barney Wilen, René Urtreger, Pierre Michelot and Kenny Clarke, and for John Cassavetes's *Shadows* (1960) by Charlie Mingus, Phineas Newborn Jr., and Shafi Hadi. Like these precedents, Young's noodling and needling on the soundtrack function as a kind of impromptu Greek chorus, responding directly to various on-screen events and providing a laconic commentary.

Elsewhere in our conversation, Jarmusch elaborated that the film's odd, generally slow rhythm—hypnotic if you're captured by it, as I am, and probably unendurable if you're not—was influenced by classical Japanese period movies by Mizoguchi and Kurosawa, and the tendency of scenes in those movies to exist in isolation from one another as complete units, like beads on a string.

Young's brilliant album of 'music from and inspired by' *Dead Man*, lasting slightly over an hour, which often registers like an alternate version of the film—a composer's cut, as it were—

reconfigures this relation between past and present by periodically including the sounds of cars passing on a highway. It also features not only patches of dialogue from the film, but also out-of-character readings by Johnny Depp of other Blake poems that were never part of the film, even on the script level.

Without picking up on the Japanese element, the first four of Greil Marcus's 'Ten reasons why Neil Young's *Dead Man* is the best music for the dog days of the twentieth century' point to comparable meditative qualities in this score:

1. For a film set more than a century ago, an electric guitar, playing a modal melody, surrounded by nothing, sounds older than anything you see on the screen.
2. The modal melody is never resolved, never completed. It feels less like a song than a fanfare, a fanfare for a parade no one ever got around to organizing.
3. The fanfare is stirring nevertheless. It's life and death from the start—or rather life staring death in the face. Death is going to win, but not even death knows how long it's going to take. Nobody, the Indian who tries and fails to dig a bullet out of Depp's William Blake. . .speaks of 'the white man who killed you'; 'I'm not dead,' Depp says. Nobody doesn't laugh. Young's guitar speaks for him, just as Nobody insists William Blake will now make his poetry with a gun.
4. Young doesn't laugh either. His guitar doesn't even crack a smile.

Nobody's Indian nickname, 'He Who Talks Loud Saying Nothing', derives from James Brown's 'Talkin' Loud and Sayin' Nothing', and even the line 'My name is Nobody,' which some commentators have linked to the 1973 Italian Western produced by Sergio Leone, is for Jarmusch a reference to Conway Twitty.

"This is the Western Andrei Tarkovsky always wanted to make."
J. Hoberman

JARMUSCH: I recently came across this interesting quote from Sam Peckinpah: 'The Western is a universal frame within which it's possible to comment on today.' Of course, I only saw this quote after I made *Dead Man*.

In Hollywood Westerns, even in the 30s and 40s, history was mythologised to accommodate some kind of moral code. And what really affects me deeply is when you see it taken to the extent where Native Americans become mythical people. I think it's in *The Searchers* where John Ford had some Indians who were supposedly Comanche, but he cast Navajos who spoke Navajo. It's kind of like saying, 'Yes, I know they are supposed to be French People, but I could only get Germans, and no one will know the difference.'

It's really close to apartheid in America. The people in power will do whatever they can to maintain that, and TV and movies are perfect ways to keep people stupid and brainwashed. In regards to *Dead Man*, I just wanted to make an Indian character who wasn't either (a) the savage that must be eliminated, the force of nature that's blocking the way for industrial progress, or (b) the noble innocent that knows all and is another cliché. I wanted him to be a complicated human being.

Blake's westbound journey with Nobody also falls into a classic literary pattern found in some of the most famous American novels: a biracial male couple bonding, escaping civilisation together and moving back towards innocence, a pattern famously outlined by Leslie Fiedler in what is probably his most influential essay.

“a tale N/nobody can tell the return of a repressed western history in jim jarmusch’s dead man” melinda szaloky in Western films through History. Edited by Janet Walker. Routledge NY 2001

It is widely believed that the Myth of the Frontier constitutes the single most important frame of reference for America’s self-understanding. The frontier myth alloys two major themes. On the one hand, it depicts the territory lying beyond the frontier as an abundant and unappropriated land that is simply there for the taking. On the other, it conceives of American history as a heroic and necessarily violent war against the Indians for possession of the land.

A curious blend of scholarship and popular culture Born in 1953, the writer-director [Jarmusch] told interviewer Charlie Rose on PBS “When I first read Blake it kind of blew my mind to read this kind of thought from centuries ago.” Blake’s revolutionary impact is suggested by one scene in *Dead Man*: as a child Nobody, captured by British soldiers and taken across the Atlantic as an exhibit, “mimicked them. Imitating their ways,” until the boy by chance discovers Blake’s poetry. We see Nobody’s story in cameo-like flashbacks accompanied by his narration. As he speaks we see an Indian in English clothes of the period open one of Blake’s books. Nobody says of that moment: “I discovered the words that you—William Blake—had written. They were powerful words, and they spoke to me.” Nobody is so moved by Blake’s words that he escapes his captors and eventually returns home.

...*Dead Man* might be the first black-and-white Western since *The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance* (1962), John Ford’s elegy to the passing of the Old West.

Unlike these revisionist works [*Little Big Man*, *Buffalo Bill and the Indians*, *Heaven’s Gate*] *Dead Man* is built around a classic journey across the entire American West, from Blake’s train ride from the East into Machine in the film’s prologue through to his flight from Machine to the Northwestern shore, aided and accompanied by his spiritual guide Nobody. We last glimpse Blake traveling further west in his canoe, traveling across “the mirror of water,” as Nobody calls the ocean.

Yet—and this is perhaps *Dead Man*’s key difference from the classic (spiritual, psychological, moral) journey western—Bill Blake is a protagonist who never learns anything from his ordeal. He is a traveler across a mythic landscape who remains oblivious to it. At the very end of the movie, after Nobody tells him of his impending trip “back where you came from,” Blake’s response—“You mean Cleveland?”—demonstrates just how ignorant he is of where he’s been, where he’s going, or even his own fate: death in the sea canoe Nobody will shortly launch. This comic deflation of the very notion of a spiritual quest may be one of the most offputting elements of the film—at least to those who prefer goal-oriented as opposed to absurdist narratives. We are thus forced to consider *Dead Man* not as a classic western, a mythical western, or as a revisionist variant of same, but instead as a comic western—an approach which may prove instructive.

Johnny Depp’s performance in *Dead Man* is redolent of another actor who made his share of comic westerns, Buster Keaton. Complete to the chapeau suggesting the flat hat Keaton wore in most of his films, the long hair he wore in the Civil War western (of sorts) *The General* (1926), and the dudishly out-of-place suit Keaton sported in another quasi-western, *Our Hospitality* (1923)

(which may explain its versatility and lang-standing popularity with establishment and populace alike), the frontier myth in its duality came to represent the essence of American history.

Jim Jarmusch’s *Dead Man* functions as an innovative revisionist western by highlighting and relativizing various taken-for-granted conventions and, through this makes way for the dreaded return of history (of conquest and genocide masked as expansion and progress) forgotten, yet not dead: a history of the dead.

“The Western Under Erasure: *Dead Man*” by Gregg Rickman (1998) in *The Western Reader*. Edited by Jim Kitses and Gregg Rickman. Limelight Editions NY 1998

Depp in *Dead Man* seems at times to be continuing the Keaton pastiche he had already attempted in the contemporary comedy *Benny & Joon* (1993). Blake’s scene in Machine’s bar, seeking the solace of whiskey with his last few coins and having a larger bottle replaced with a smaller one when the bartender sees the size of his fee, strongly suggests Keaton’s ill-luck while buying supplies in the opening scene of *Go West* (1925)—both scenes employing the same basic joke, shrinking resources purchasing less and less.

Keaton’s films too can be thought of as critiques of traditional masculine roles. . . a sustained challenge to the notion of masculinity as brutality.

Keaton took full advantage of the western genre to expand on this critique. His short film *The Paleface* (1922) is a remarkable early example of the “pro-Indian western”—Buster playing s butterfly-collecting dude who becomes involved in a tribe’s efforts to keep their oil rights. Another short from that same year, *The Frozen North*, is a ruthless parody of the ideas of masculinity the comedian found embodied in William S. Hart’s westerns. Keaton’s anti-hero knocks unconscious or kills various women, cries fake tears, and amorally proceeds on his way. Hart was reportedly deeply offended by the film which evidently struck home. Conversely, Keaton’s one overtly western feature *Go West* presents as its hero one Friendless, probably the least traditionally masculine hero Keaton ever essayed, a lonely man in stark white clown makeup whose great love is a cow called Brown Eyes. The unsmiling Friendless parries a demand out of Wister’s *The Virginian* (“when you call me thatsmile”) with a gesture drawn from silent cinema’s great female victim, Lillian Gish in *Broken Blossoms*.

It is, however, another largely comic western that may help us better place *Dead Man* within the context of its genre. The title of this western is actually used as a line of dialogue in *Dead Man*: when Bill Blake first asks his new companion what his name is, the Indian replies “My name is Nobody.” *My Name is Nobody* (Tonino Valerii, 1973) is an interesting Italian western which parodies the major works in the genre by Sergio Leone, who’s credited as the film’s supervisor. The parallels between the two films are quite marked—in the Valerii film Henry Fonda plays an aging gunfighter whose reputation (*à la* the Gregory Peck figure in *The Gunfighter*) has made him a target for every ambitious gunman in the West. Similarly, in *Dead Man*, Blake’s poster begins appearing all over the forest he’s traveling through, his toll of victims and the amount of reward for his capture increasing as the film progresses. Like Blake in *Dead Man*, Fonda is aided by a fellow wanderer who latches on to him, also called Nobody (Terence Hill).

A focal shift to seeing Nobody as the film’s true hero might thus

allow us after all to see *Dead Man* as a positive, mythical spiritual journey western. . . .With his droll humor and seemingly magical skills. Nobody further suggests the Trickster legends of many

indigenous cultures.

Dead Man evades every attempt to affix a positive meaning to its narrative. . . .

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