Publicity shot of Gene Tierney on the Bass Lake location shoot of *Leave Her to Heaven*. Courtesy of the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences

The Front Lawn of Heaven: Landscape in Hollywood Melodrama circa 1945

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To me high mountains are a feeling.
—Byron, *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*

In woman was to be summed up the whole of alien Nature.
—Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*

One of the most familiar stories about the US after the Second World War involves the decline of the city and the emergence of the suburbs. Cinema studies has produced its own analysis of how films from the post–World War II era negotiated this shift: film noir, it is said, depicts urban alienation in the 1940s and 1950s, tracing a geography of bankrupt city life; postwar American melodrama dramatizes suburban alienation, revealing the stifled lives behind all those brand-new picture windows. The canonical noirs are supposedly all about the city: *The Maltese Falcon* (dir. John Huston, US, 1941), *Double Indemnity* (dir. Billy Wilder, US, 1944),

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The Lady from Shanghai (dir. Orson Welles, US, 1948), and *Kiss Me Deadly* (dir. Robert Aldrich, US, 1955); while postwar melodramas are said to be all about the suburbs (and small towns) and correlated with the rise of television in this era: *Rebel without a Cause* (dir. Nicholas Ray, US, 1955), *Peyton Place* (dir. Mark Robson, US, 1957), *No Down Payment* (dir. Martin Ritt, US, 1957), and *Imitation of Life* (dir. Douglas Sirk, US, 1959). As the spatial language of geography has infiltrated film studies, some historians have argued that noir documents precisely this postwar shift: "the urban ambivalence of Americans in the age of white flight."[1]

While it is certainly true that film noirs are typically set in the city and that post–World War II American melodramas often stage conflict in the suburbs, it is also obvious that the city and the suburbs were not the only spaces dramatized in this era.[2] In fact, both kinds of film frequently used nature as an important setting, presenting outdoor landscapes as another kind of foil for the modern cityscape. Many noirs take place neither in the city nor in the suburbs, but in rural or wilderness locations: *Out of the Past* (dir. Jacques Tourneur, US, 1947), *On Dangerous Ground* (dir. Nicholas Ray, France, 1952), and *High Sierra* (dir. Raoul Walsh, US, 1941), for example. Likewise, many key scenes in postwar melodramas take place in outdoor settings, especially in Sirk films such as *Magnificent Obsession* (US, 1954), *All That Heaven Allows* (US, 1955), and *Written on the Wind* (US, 1956). The postwar US was not only a place of decaying cities and spreading suburbs, and melodrama has never been exclusively about domesticity; *nature* is a mediating term in this geography.

As an alternative to these familiar accounts, I argue that attention to rural and wilderness landscapes in postwar cinema can reveal a different spatial sensibility in this period. While wilderness landscapes had played an important role in the silent era, they largely disappeared at the beginning of the sound era, as early sound recording technology necessitated a controlled studio environment.[3] Wilderness landscapes began to reappear in the 1940s as location shooting became more common after World War II. This shift outdoors is sometimes credited to the influence of documentary filmmaking during the war, as well as the popularity of

Italian neorealism in the US, but we can also connect it to shifting cultural sentiments about cities.[4] As attitudes about urban space began changing by midcentury, various alternatives to the urban model of living emerged. Suburbanization is the most frequently discussed phenomenon, but alongside this trend was also a new appreciation of the natural world that gathered steam in the postwar era, culminating with the ecology movement of the late 1960s.[5] One does not typically envision the late 1940s and early 1950s as an important point in the history of the American "back to the land" movement, but, in fact, as tourism emerged as a major industry after the war, a growing segment of the population engaged in camping, fishing, and other outdoor forms of leisure. Indeed, the immediate postwar period was the era in which tourism began to replace traditional industries such as farming in many rural locations around the country.[6] After the war, outdoor landscapes began to appear more frequently in Hollywood melodramas, often as leisure destinations for the main characters (and serving as implicit promotion for actual tourism).

Leave Her to Heaven (dir. John M. Stahl, US, 1945) is a film that particularly complicates our understanding of Hollywood cinema's spatial sensibility at the dawn of the postwar era. Released by Twentieth Century–Fox on 20 December 1945, the film was one of the biggest box-office hits of 1946.[7] It garnered domestic and foreign rentals totaling $8.2 million, far outpacing other releases in the context of what was already a very profitable year for Hollywood.[8] Shot in Technicolor and mostly on location, *Leave Her to Heaven* dramatizes several key issues of the era—work, leisure, and sex—by staging its action against spectacular natural backdrops. Like nature itself, the main character is portrayed as a tempestuous and unpredictable force that exceeds the boundaries of domesticity and moral certitude. *Leave Her to Heaven* presents a femme fatale in nature whose power flows from her primal connection to the wilderness landscapes she inhabits.

Nature is, of course, a broad concept with a long intellectual history. As the historian Roderick Frazier Nash explains, "Depending on the context . . . 'nature' might be synonymous with wilderness, or it could refer to a city park."[9] One goal of this essay is to

analyze how nature functioned in postwar Hollywood melodrama to naturalize the changing social and historical role of women. I focus on *Leave Her to Heaven*'s use of landscape as a key cinematic device that connects nature to femininity and the nascent commercial world of postwar leisure. I argue that the film's remarkable landscapes do not simply function as a backdrop for the narrative but contribute to the film's meaning in larger ways. Two specifically cinematic techniques of landscape representation—location shooting and Technicolor—construct a contradictory sense of realistic fantasy space in this film. That realistic fantasy space, in turn, synthesizes multiple attitudes into a single cinematic statement of ambivalence about femininity.

Leave Her to Heaven's production during the last year of the war, and its subsequent release four months after the war, place it in a pivotal historical moment. The film's singularity might seem to forestall its use as text with which to make broad claims about nature and landscape in the postwar era, but its huge box-office success indicates that it struck a nerve upon its release. In addition, the film was possibly a model for Sirk, who remade three of Stahl's black-and-white melodramas, *Imitation of Life* (US, 1934), *Magnificent Obsession* (US, 1935), and *When Tomorrow Comes* (US, 1939) (which Sirk remade as *Interlude* [US, 1957]), in Technicolor in the 1950s.[10] Indeed, *Leave Her to Heaven* demonstrates precisely the effect Thomas Elsaesser famously ascribed to Sirk's films: the displacement of unspeakable emotions onto mise-en-scène.[11] This film's deep ambivalence and many contradictions—which at times border on incoherence—coupled with its initial success and renewed appeal today demand a reconsideration of genre and excess in classical Hollywood cinema. While this article is primarily a single film analysis, I hope that *Leave Her to Heaven* might serve as a sort of curious prototype for certain styles and attitudes that took different directions as postwar cinema developed.

Leave Her to Heaven is certainly not a film with an environmental sensibility, and I am not claiming that it embodies any nascent countercultural ideas about nature (as one might make a case for *All That Heaven Allows*, for example, with the film's charac-

ter Ron Kirby and his emulation of Henry David Thoreau). Rather, *Leave Her to Heaven*'s spectacular natural landscapes provide an expressive dimension that dignifies the intensity of its characters' actions. Scenes of mourning, romance, and murder are set in the great outdoors, while the film's interior sets are cluttered with potted plants that signify the tamed emotions of domestic life. *Leave Her to Heaven*'s remarkable landscapes can open up a new line of investigation into cinema of the postwar era, in which nature—as landscape, myth, and tourist destination—is just as important as the city or the suburbs.

"Despite all this, there are certain things about her that you rather like"

As is well known, at the end of World War II, hundreds of thousands of American women were fired from their jobs to make way for soldiers returning home to work. At this time, a backlash against working women appeared in all forms of mass culture, including a marked increase in representations of "evil women" in film.[12] *Leave Her to Heaven* is one of the more notorious examples of such films, although, surprisingly, it has received very little scholarly attention. An adaptation of the best-selling 1944 book of the same name by Ben Ames Williams, the film announces its literary origin with its title sequence, which uses the convention of book pages turning to present its credits. The film's bookish pretensions extend to the title's reference to *Hamlet*.[13] The title gives both the film and the novel an aura of cultural prestige in an era of ascendant middlebrow culture and the "five-foot-shelf," just as the GI Bill was beginning to democratize access to higher education for returning veterans.[14] For film viewers unfamiliar with *Hamlet*, the title's invocation of heaven connects the film's female protagonist with the world of the afterlife before the narrative even begins.

Leave Her to Heaven uses a device common to the woman's film: a doubling of female characters in which femininity is split into two models: one bad woman and one good woman.[15] Wealthy

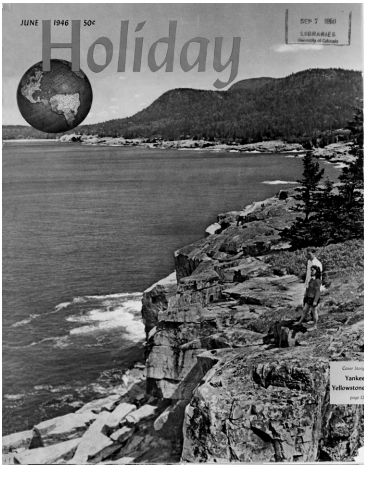
and beautiful Ellen Berent, played by Gene Tierney, is an obsessive "evil woman" who is so jealous of those who seem to compete for her husband's love that she allows her young brother-in-law to drown in a lake while she looks on, stone-faced. Soon after, when pregnant, she induces a miscarriage by throwing herself down the stairs, to eliminate her baby who has become another imagined competitor. Her cousin (and adopted sister) Ruth, played by Jeanne Crain, is the "good woman" who selflessly endures all the dark events of the film's narrative to emerge validated at the end. "Evil" Ellen ultimately commits suicide, but stages it in such a way that Ruth is framed for her murder. This being a mainstream Hollywood film made during the Production Code era, the "good woman" Ruth is found innocent and vindicated at the film's end. However, while the film clearly villainizes Ellen and validates Ruth, it derives much of its odd tone and powerful impact from the fact that Ellen is made to look more interesting than Ruth, despite her reprehensible ways. As Fox studio head Darryl F. Zanuck himself put it: "The woman in *Leave Her to Heaven* deliberately kills her own unborn child, drowns the crippled brother of her husband and endeavors to send her adopted sister to the electric chair. And yet, despite all this, there are certain things about her that you rather like."[16] The film's ambiguous moral world allows for simultaneous and opposed assessments of its characters and story. Its flamboyant visual style and multiple meanings seem to have contributed to its success, both upon its initial release and as it reaches new audiences today.

Produced during World War II and released just months after the war ended, *Leave Her to Heaven* resembles many other 1940s films in which the war's presence can be felt although it is never mentioned.[17] Ellen's love interest, Richard (Cornel Wilde), is one of only two eligible bachelors in a film populated mostly by women and older men. The shortage of young men in the film mirrors the actual demographics of the US during the war: "By 1944 there were two and one-half times more single women than men living in America."[18] Although the film does not address it explicitly, Richard's color blindness would have rendered him 4–F, or ineligible for the draft for medical reasons, which explains his

presence in this wartime landscape devoid of young men. Richard's color blindness in this Technicolor film is also a heavy-handed signal that he will ultimately be unable to appreciate Ellen's passionate, colorful nature (or, from a different perspective, that he cannot perceive what others can plainly see).

The film unleashes the consumerist possibilities of postwar America with its panorama of locations as leisure destinations. As Richard and Ellen pull into Warm Springs, Georgia, in their car, fresh from the first leg of their honeymoon, they function as surrogate sightseers for the spectators in the movie theater. As the characters travel from location to location, the film lays out a kind of virtual tourist itinerary for the audience. Rancho San Jacinto in New Mexico has served as a vacation destination for Ellen and her father for years, and while the backwoods cabin in Maine is not exactly a vacation spot—it serves rather as a second home that signifies, among other things, the characters' wealth—it nonetheless provides one more depiction of the life of leisure.

The film's dramatization of leisure anticipated demographic changes of the time: tourism quickly reemerged as a major industry in the US after the deprivations of World War II. In 1949 the US Department of Commerce estimated that 62 percent of Americans took vacations, and a 1950 survey by the *Saturday Evening Post* indicated that 80 percent of all domestic long-distance vacations were by automobile.[19] Catering to this new appetite for tourism, *Holiday*, a full-color magazine devoted to domestic and foreign travel, began publishing in March 1946. *Holiday*'s June 1946 cover depicts a young, barefoot couple in Maine's Acadia National Park, gazing over a precipice above the Atlantic Ocean, as if to say,



Holiday magazine, June 1946. Curtis Publishing Co.

"All this lies before you now." This hugely successful publication contributed to the new visualization of tourism in the postwar era, a visualization that frequently eroticized vacation travel.

Like the tourist industry's promotion of vacation imagery, *Leave Her to Heaven* presents a mise-en-scène of leisure that systematically elides not only the war but labor in general. Rather than work, as so many women did during the war, these wealthy characters live carefree lives free from toil. The cabin's caretaker, Thorne, played by Chill Wills, is the only significant character who does not seem to share the others' wealthy status. While the film's two younger male characters do work, their careers are hardly depicted as demanding; Russell Quinton (Vincent Price), Ellen's ex-fiancé, is a lawyer with political aspirations, and Richard is a writer. Richard occasionally is shown working on a novel, furrowing his brow and typing next to the pool, and Russell plays an important role in the courtroom scene at the end of the film. However, for the most part, work is depicted as a nuisance in this film. In one particularly significant scene with Richard, Ellen complains that his writing takes up too much of his time. "After all, it isn't as if you had to write for a living. I've got more than enough for both of us," she pleads. As if to blunt the unconventionality of this suggestion, her previously straight dialogue turns part mocking, as she continues, "And darling, it's the dearest wish of my heart to support you." Richard replies, smiling, "Is that bad?" The film seems to take this question to heart, negotiating cultural anxieties about the role of women circa 1945: should women work outside the home, and how much power should they be allowed? On the surface, the film seems to answer these questions with a firm, paternalistic "no" and "not much." Ellen is demonized because she has enough money to be independent, because she dares to pursue her sexual desires, and because she tries to dominate Richard through her possessiveness. But as I argue, there is a major undercurrent in the film that also validates Ellen's position, due to the staging of her actions in grand natural landscapes.

Ellen is regularly associated with nature: she is an excellent swimmer (obnoxiously pronouncing herself "the winner!" when she beats two young children in a swimming race) a superb

Ellen emerging from the sea

Ruth, "the gal with the hoe"

horse rider, and enjoys perfect health, except when pregnant. In particular, Ellen is associated with water, as in the swimming race scene just mentioned, the crashing ocean in which she swims near the end of the film, and the central murder scene on the lake. In contrast, Ruth moves more gently and does not engage in athletic pursuits. Ruth is a gardener who is most frequently seen hoeing and pruning plants; her nickname is "the gal with the hoe." Thus the film establishes a binary in which the "evil" woman is associated with wild nature, while the "good" woman enacts the taming of nature.

Rather than simply dismiss the forces associated with the "evil" woman, in keeping with the ambivalence of so many women's films, there is clearly something about Ellen's primal nature that the film wants to endorse, whereas Ruth's model of domestication seems bland by comparison. As this schema begins to indicate, the film's attitude about wilderness in conflict with domesticity resembles the generic tropes of the western genre. Likewise, the film's ambivalence about the moral valence of these two categories (wilderness and domesticity) resembles the western's own ambivalence about the settling of the West and the nation's consequential loss of mythic freedom. Outdoor landscapes in westerns often signify a generalized sense of nature and untamed organic forces. *Leave Her to Heaven*'s use of outdoor locations is an efficient way of signaling the thematic concerns of the western, while changing the nuance of these concerns to fit a feminine rather than a masculine generic paradigm. The film's outdoor settings in effect allow it to map sexual desire (a concern of the woman's film) onto the western

genre's traditional exploration of the opposition between civilization and savagery.

In one of the few scholarly articles written on Stahl, George Morris observes that Stahl's films often use "one of melodrama's oldest devices: the appearance of a natural catastrophe to reflect the human drama being enacted below. An awareness of a larger metaphysic pervades the films. The elemental forces of nature . . . form tempestuous backgrounds to the melodrama."[20] In fact, *Leave Her to Heaven* works through the classic opposition between the garden and the wilderness that historians such as Nash and Leo Marx first analyzed in the 1960s.[21] Ellen and Ruth personify opposite sides of this wilderness/garden antinomy. Ellen's beauty is associated with the wilderness, and functions as a dazzling spectacle, but it is ultimately rejected in favor of Ruth's domestic model of femininity, which the film validates at its conclusion. The film's landscapes articulate this opposition between wilderness and garden. Melodramatic characteristics outlined by Peter Brooks, such as "the forcing of tone [and] the constant reaching toward sublimity of expression," are well suited to the tradition of landscape representation. Melodrama's drive to make the world "morally legible" is just as germane to wilderness settings as urban ones, and as *Leave Her to Heaven* demonstrates, outdoor landscapes can efficiently signal the inflated but repressed emotions characteristic of this mode.[22]

Ellen's association with wild nature anticipates Marilyn Monroe's character Rose in *Niagara* (dir. Henry Hathaway, US, 1953) eight years later. Rose is quite literally equated with the landscape in posters for the film that depicted a giant Monroe recumbent atop the crest of the falls, water gushing over her. A *New York Times* reviewer made the parallel between Monroe and nature quite explicit: "Obviously ignoring the idea that there are Seven Wonders of the World, Twentieth Century–Fox has discovered two more and enhanced them with Technicolor in *Niagara*. . . . For the producers are making full use of both the grandeur of the Falls and its adjacent areas as well as the grandeur that is Marilyn Monroe. The scenic effects in both cases are superb."[23] Richard Dyer writes that Monroe's sexuality "seemed to personify naturalness."[24]

Similarly, Lisa Cohen argues, "Looking at the artifice and spectacle of wide-screen technology makes it possible to think about the construction of Monroe's sexuality as both natural *and* hyperbolic or excessive."[25] *Leave Her to Heaven* indicates that the Technicolor combination of femininity, sexuality, and spectacle that we associate with the 1950s was actually in place by 1945.

Mutation as a System

As was typical for melodramas of the period, *Leave Her to Heaven* was marketed as a straight drama, but it clearly fits into the category of the woman's picture.[26] *Variety* wrote that the film "offers heavy magnet for the femme trade and grosses should be correspondingly big."[27] The *Hollywood Reporter*, which praised the film as a quality picture worthy of multiple Academy Award nominations, stated: "Primarily, this melodrama will appeal to women. They will want to see it if only to despise the central figure."[28] Tierney wrote in her autobiography that "the role [of Ellen] was plum, the kind of character Bette Davis might have played, that of a bitchy woman. I don't think I have such a nature, but few actresses can resist playing bitchy women."[29]

Since its initial release, subsequent decades and changes in movie taste have transformed *Leave Her to Heaven* from a woman's picture into a film noir; indeed, the film is most renowned today for being one of the few three-color Technicolor noirs ever made, along with *Niagara*.[30] The label "film noir" has obviously contributed a great deal to the contemporary marketing of classical Hollywood cinema; when *Leave Her to Heaven* was first released on DVD in February 2005, virtually every review labeled it a film noir rather than a melodrama.[31] Twentieth Century–Fox and the Academy Film Archive completed a new 35mm restoration of the film in 2007, and for the Los Angeles debut of this restoration, the film was advertised as a noir. Likewise, during the limited art house release of the restored print in 2009, the film was frequently labeled a noir.[32] The film seems to have struck a chord with audiences lately, now that "excess" has become a popular style. As I discuss below, the film's "excessive" elements befuddled its initial

Leave Her to Heaven as film noir

Leave Her to Heaven as western

Leave Her to Heaven as woman's picture

critics, but these are precisely the qualities that audiences seem to appreciate today.

In fact, *Leave Her to Heaven* contains multiple generic registers—the woman's film, the film noir, and the western—thus exceeding the boundaries of genre that film scholarship has attempted to systematize. Genre is a notoriously slippery subject, and as revisionist scholarship has shown, film noir and melodrama are closely related.[33] Taking a wide perspective, film noir can be seen as a variety of melodrama in its broadest sense, which embodies not only sentiment but also the action-oriented appeals of the thriller category in which the noirs were originally understood. All of the generic categories found in *Leave Her to Heaven* can be said to fit into the broader melodramatic mode. Linda Williams writes, "Film critics have often not seen the forest of melodrama—the sense in which all these genres, and many more, partake of a basic melodramatic mode—for the trees of these individual genres."[34] If we grant the revisionist argument that melodrama should be understood as an expansive mode characteristic of a great deal of popular cinema, then understanding how it works in different settings can help us gain some precision on this broad category. Thinking through landscape can help bring the forest of melodrama into clearer focus.

While melodrama is hyperbolic and typically opposed to realism, Williams has argued that "melodrama consistently decks itself out in the latest trappings of realism" to foster believability.[35] With the rise of location shooting in the postwar period, and the increasing use of color film stock by the mid-1950s, it is possible to explore these "trappings of realism" as they functioned in the waning decades of the Hollywood studio era. In this context, location shooting is significant not for the way it has been used to signify real places but for the way it has just as frequently been used to construct a generalized but authentic sense of the outdoors. Moreover, the film's mythic quality is heightened by its Technicolor film stock, which renders the brilliant outdoor colors of nature unnatural. *Leave Her to Heaven* uses landscape as a melodramatic device that synthesizes contradictory attitudes about women, sexuality, and work.

In addition to functioning as a woman's film in 1945 and a film noir today, *Leave Her to Heaven* demonstrates how we might conceptualize genre not as a static element running through an entire film but as a mutable element that changes scene by scene, in small generic capsule-moments. The film's opening on a railroad car (with low-key lighting, venetian blinds casting gentle Technicolor shadows across the actors' bodies) fits into what we now consider a film noir schema, while the second segment of the film in New Mexico fits into the category of the western. It becomes a woman's picture when Ellen plays housewife, and it returns to the noir, or thriller, mode when she allows her brother-in-law Danny to drown. The final segment of the film becomes a police procedural when Ruth is tried and exonerated for Ellen's murder. This genre shifting is indicated not only by the different kinds of narrative events that occur (horse riding in the western segment, seduction and then murder in the noir/thriller segments, etc.) but also by the film's mise-en-scène. The overstuffed interior set of Ellen and Richard's dining room invokes a whole world of previous women's films, and their exploration of domestic entrapment, before the characters utter a single word. And more important for this analysis, the southwestern landscape depicted in the funeral segment, in which the open sky takes up half the compositional space, connotes the freedom and expansiveness depicted in many westerns.

Because these outdoor locations are so stunning, and rendered in Technicolor, they tend to be remembered by viewers more than the film's interiors. Indeed, contemporary reviews of *Leave Her to Heaven* unfailingly made reference to the film's outdoor locations rather than to its indoor sets. With its landscapes, the film quickly and efficiently draws contrasts between the different worlds in which the characters move, making meanings that could not otherwise be fully expressed in dialogue or action.

These generic capsule-moments work together to create a film that ultimately has more complexity than a single-genre picture. Cynthia Erb argues that the 1933 *King Kong* (dir. Merian C. Cooper and Ernest B. Schoedsack, US) succeeded because of its multiple generic registers, including adventure film, romance, and horror film.[36] I am suggesting that perhaps generic hybridity is a characteristic of many commercially successful films; in addition to *King Kong*, this argument has also been made about *Casablanca* (dir. Michael Curtiz, US, 1943). A variety of generic resonances allows a single film to present a variety of appeals to different kinds of audience members. This multivalent appeal was particularly important in the classical era, when films aimed to reach a broad general audience. Generic hybridity may appear to be an exception to the seemingly stable rules of genre, but perhaps it should be thought of as a formula all its own. Indeed, as Richard Maltby argues, "Classical cinema deals in economies of pleasure rather than the aesthetics of organic forms. . . . In every Hollywood movie there are coincidences, inconsistencies, gaps and delays, which are registered by the audience as digressions or as opportunities" for unsanctioned responses.[37]

In his book *Film/Genre*, Rick Altman contends that film genre remains theoretically problematic, resisting scholarly attempts to unpack it. Most genre critics impose stable borders onto their object of study, thus ignoring history and not taking audience reception into account. Altman argues that attention to history—to the films that disrupt generic boundaries—can be a useful place to rethink the meaning of genre: "The theoretical clarity of film genre criticism is quite obviously challenged at every turn by the historical dimensions of film production and reception. . . . Where the theory of generic reception requires texts whose genres are immediately

and transparently recognizable, the most interesting texts . . . are complex, mobile, and mysterious. Where Linnaeus' scientific . . . nomenclature assumes pure specimens, genre history offers cross-breeds and mutants."[38] *Leave Her to Heaven* is just such a mutant, but perhaps mutants have the most interesting things to say. In a different article, Altman writes that despite the presence of a dominant narrative logic in mainstream films, "we repeatedly find multiple logics at work. . . . Unless we recognize the possibility that excess . . . may itself be organized as a system, then we will hear only the official language and forever miss the text's dialect."[39] I am suggesting that landscape is one such "excessive" element that can function systematically in melodrama to modulate incongruities.

Watching *Leave Her to Heaven*, one cannot but be impressed by the number of contradictions, gaps, and excessive qualities the film is able to sustain, while still telling a legible story—indeed, a profitable story. This film is not just marked by a few odd elements here and there; rather, it is a festival of excessive moments. Its spectacular locations; its bold Technicolor sensibility; its stars, costumes, bizarre character behavior, and undermotivated plot points—all these aspects are not merely latent in the text but presented front and center. If we view these excessive qualities as elements that do not necessarily run counter to the narrative but rather inform and construct the narrative, then it becomes crucial to understand how this excess functions. Nonnarrative aspects of film—elements such as mise-en-scène and music, which have both been undertheorized—are arguably just as important as narrative. Certainly, *Leave Her to Heaven* did not require Technicolor location shooting in grand outdoor landscapes to tell its story—the film might just as well have been shot in black and white on a soundstage. *Leave Her to Heaven*'s excess—which so saturates the film as to render it at times incoherent—was arguably one of its appeals, allowing for multiple interpretations by various kinds of spectators.

The Melodramatic Landscape

In the opening scene of *Leave Her to Heaven*, Ellen meets novelist Richard Harland on a train to New Mexico and quickly falls in love with him. The film establishes a pop-Freudian causality for her

love when she tells him he looks so much like her dead father "it's uncanny." Ellen and Richard quickly marry (he should have known better: *she* proposed to him) and travel to visit Richard's younger brother, Danny (Darryl Hickman), who is an invalid, presumably suffering from polio, convalescing at the Georgia Warm Springs Foundation. Warm Springs is a real hospital that at the time specialized in the treatment of polio patients; it was made famous by Franklin Delano Roosevelt, who had visited since the 1920s and who died there in April 1945. At Warm Springs, Ellen and Richard enjoy a brief period of happiness in which Ellen, playing housewife, presents Richard with a perfect meal she has cooked and expresses a desire to do his laundry. However, this domestic idyll is quickly interrupted when the couple decide to leave for Richard's family cabin in Maine, called "Back of the Moon." Complete isolation in a natural retreat would have been paradise for Ellen, except that young Danny ends up accompanying them.

Throughout the first half of the film, Ellen falls in love with Richard and grows increasingly resentful of Danny and other characters who show up at Back of the Moon. Audience sympathies are kept in a fluctuating position partly through characterization and the action of the narrative, but also because of the mise-en-scène. On the one hand, Ellen's love for her husband is presented as true and complete. She happily plays the role of submissive wife by cooking meals and keeping house, and thus appears morally validated within the ideology of traditional femininity. On the other hand, Ellen's problem is that of so many protagonists of women's films: she has too much desire.[40] Ellen's mother, in fact, says so outright: "There's nothing wrong with Ellen. It's just that she loves too much." Ellen's "problem," then, is an emotional one, which the film discredits through the narrative—Ellen becomes a murderer—but validates through the mise-en-scène: Ellen's actions are carried out against the backdrop of magnificent landscapes, making her evil actions look grand.

Ellen cannot stand any competitors for her husband's love. So what does a "bad woman" do in such a situation? She kills, of course. In what is perhaps the film's most memorable scene, Ellen allows young Danny to drown as she looks on impassively from

Production still of Danny's death scene. Courtesy of the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences

behind dark glasses. Danny's death reveals Ellen's irredeemable villainy. But significantly, the scene is presented without music. Ellen has taken Danny out for a swim on the lake; we hear boat oars hitting the water while Danny paddles ahead of her. As Danny begins to cry out that the water is cold, that he has a cramp, Ellen does not respond. Danny flails about desperately and goes under, drowning. The film then gives us a full fifteen seconds of screen silence as Ellen sits frozen in the boat, before Richard's whistling onshore brings her to her senses. She then makes a show of diving in to rescue Danny, but of course she is too late. For a melodrama, this restrained use of sound at a moment of high drama is quite unusual. It is as though the scene's visual richness is so overpowering that the soundtrack has been pulled back, for fear of overloading the viewer's senses. Not until Danny's death scene is over and the film has moved to the next scene in Bar Harbor, Maine, do we get the expected melodramatic burst of horns from Alfred Newman's score, punctuating the drama that has just unfolded.

As Brooks and many other commentators have pointed out, both stage and film forms of melodrama rely on music to supple-

ment its meaning: music confers legibility to drama.[41] Music provides the emotion, or *melos*, of the melodrama, giving the audience guidelines about what to feel at any given moment. Like music, landscapes have also served as another way of shaping a film's tone or mood, of speaking the unspeakable. Sergei Eisenstein, who was one of the first to theorize film sound, argued that landscape can function like music in cinema. In his long essay "The Music of Landscape and the Fate of Montage Counterpoint at a New Stage" (written in 1945), which constitutes the last section of his book *Nonindifferent Nature*, Eisenstein writes that, like music, landscape is "the freest element of film, the least burdened with servile, narrative tasks, and the most flexible in conveying moods, emotional states, and spiritual experiences."[42] Martin Lefebvre in his introduction to the essay collection *Landscape and Film* explains that for Eisenstein, "both landscape and film music share the ability to express, in cinematic form . . . what is otherwise inexpressible."[43] Thus landscapes can add emotional tone to film, wordlessly signifying a host of other meanings not voiced in dialogue. Because melodrama is explicitly concerned with expressivity—"the genre's very existence is bound to this possibility, and necessity, of saying everything"—it follows that landscape plays a particularly important role in melodramatic cinema.[44] Indeed, Eisenstein claims that "landscape lies closest to music" in its embodiment of "pure emotionality."[45]

If music confers legibility to melodrama, the lack of music in Danny's death sequence confers an ambiguity on what might otherwise be read as a standard melodramatic murder scene. The audience is left to wonder: Is Ellen committing premeditated murder? Why doesn't she move to help Danny? Even more so, the scene's setting in the outdoors, under a glaring sun, upends our generic expectations for such a murder scene. Isn't death found down dark alleyways at night? Doesn't nature serve as a site of rejuvenation in American national mythology? Not necessarily. This scene demonstrates the principle that landscape can function like music to express what would otherwise be inexpressible. As Technicolor color consultant Natalie Kalmus explained: "The goal . . . was to produce a color score, like a musical score, that 'amplifies the picture' by matching color to the 'dominant mood or emotion' of a

sequence."[46] In using a music analogy, Kalmus enables us to extend Brooks's observation that music confers legibility to melodrama: color can also confer legibility, functioning as another device for signifying unspeakable emotions.

The beauty of the natural scenery in Danny's death scene runs counter to the grim events depicted there, invoking not a conventional tone of horror but the horror of the sublime. In this scene, the landscape is not merely excessive or subordinated to narrative, because it is literally the landscape that murders as Ellen lets nature take over and kill Danny for her. Or rather, as Ellen sits immobile, she seems to conspire with the landscape to bring about Danny's death. Like Ellen, the beautiful, watery landscape of Back of the Moon has been rendered glorious and terrible at the same time. Mountains and oceans are traditional settings for sublime landscape representation, as aesthetic philosophers such as Immanuel Kant theorized in the eighteenth century. It is worth remembering here that the sublime is itself a contradictory experience of pleasure mixed with mortal fear. In this way, the film's landscapes fit into a tradition of sublime representation, which, as Kant argued, cannot fully be represented. "For what is sublime . . . cannot be contained in any sensible form but concerns only ideas of reason, which, though they cannot be exhibited adequately, are aroused and called to mind by this very inadequacy, which can be exhibited in sensibility."[47] *Leave Her to Heaven*'s version of sublimity connects femininity with sexuality and renders both treacherous.

As Marjorie Hope Nicolson argued in her classic 1959 study *Mountain Gloom and Mountain Glory*, by the nineteenth century, nature was no longer the threat it had once been and instead came to signify the infinite or the ineffable. "A century and a half ago, mountains became 'temples of Nature built by the Almighty' and 'natural cathedrals, or natural altars . . . with their clouds resting on them as the smoke of a continual sacrifice.' A century and a half earlier, however, they had been 'Nature's Shames and Ills' and 'Warts, Wens, Blisters, Imposthumes.' "[48] Like others before her, Nicolson argues that this shift in attitude had a great deal to do with the Romantic poets, but she also connects it to the influential eighteenth-century aesthetic of the sublime. "From Infinite

God through vast Nature to the soul of man; from the soul of man through vast Nature back to Infinite God—here is the process that was becoming characteristic of 'The Aesthetics of the Infinite.' "[49] This correlation between nature and the infinite shows up not only in the literary texts analyzed by Nicolson, but also in the more popular domain of cinema. Indeed, popular cinema's commitment to reaching for the infinite is underscored by the many references to heaven found in other films.[50] The difference is that Hollywood cinema, being a popular form, is often less coherent than the tightly constructed poetic texts analyzed by previous generations of aesthetic critics such as Nicolson. *Leave Her to Heaven* is just such a contradictory text: it depicts wild nature as a sublime, seductive force, but it ultimately rejects that wild nature in favor of a tame domesticity.

Leave Her to Heaven's association of nature with death has been foreshadowed by an important earlier scene in which Ellen scatters her father's ashes in the New Mexico desert. The film has already established that Ellen's love for her father was excessive, and when she performs this burial ceremony, everyone else (her mother, Ruth, and also Richard standing off to the side) can only watch in amazed silence. Compositionally, they function rather like lead-in figures in traditional landscape painting, guiding the viewer's eye into the scene unfolding before them. Ellen rides on horseback with a remarkable expression on her face, somehow stoical and psychotic at the same time. Tierney's wordless performance here is precisely melodramatic in that her facial expression is meant to signify deep emotions that outrun the capacity of dialogue. Ellen mechanically pours the ashes out of an urn before flinging it away and riding off with a flourish. As in Danny's death scene (which comes later in the narrative), there is no dialogue, although the film's musical theme bellows from the soundtrack. Alongside the music and Tierney's performance, the dramatic southwestern scenery bears the burden of representation in this scene. What exactly is being signified by the vibrant red canyons, green trees, and blue sky here? The same could be asked of the music: what exactly is being signified by the swelling horns and strings, timpani drums, and crashing cymbals of this musical theme, which also opens the

film and repeats after Danny's death? At minimum, the music connotes grandiosity and drama. But the relative "goodness" or "badness" of Ellen's strange behavior is not ascertainable from the music or the scenery. Ellen's emotions are not expressible with words, but her actions are staged against the rock formations surrounding her, which seem to signify magnificence and transcendence. Ellen's behavior may appear inscrutable on the outside, in this scene and in Danny's murder scene, but the setting and music indicate that she is filled with tumultuous emotions on the inside—emotions to which we are given no other access. It is as though the landscape and the music here are meant to connote emotionality itself, validating popular notions such as the grand sweeping drama of the human condition and so forth. The generalized nature of this emotional moment is important because it can function to increase the scene's potential appeal to the widest popular audience: emotional expressiveness for the purpose less of communicating any specific point than of maximum possible marketability.

Later that day, Ellen explains to Richard why she traveled all the way from her home in Maine to spread her father's ashes in this dramatic western landscape. She and her father had made a pact, she says, to bring the ashes of the one who died first to this favorite vacation spot of theirs. "Father used to say it was like riding across the front lawn of heaven," she explains. This phrase, "the front lawn of heaven," aptly describes the film's use of landscape to signify the infinite. Heaven is a sort of unattainable home that can be approached only by way of the wilderness. The sublime natural setting of desert mountains becomes, in comparison to heaven, only a domesticated suburban yard, while heaven remains the inaccessible domain of the afterlife and the unimaginable. It is as if the vast and primal forces of nature are at once recognized and contained. Ellen, we are led to believe, feels a certain kinship with these inestimable forces, as though she is an emissary from the world of the beyond. Indeed, the Fox studio publicity synopsis describes Ellen in this scene as "like a priestess in some pagan ritual."[51] Rather than punish Ellen for this frightening kinship, the film showcases her as a bizarre freak of nature. The strange, uncategorizable look on Ellen's face as she scatters her father's

ashes indicates that this is a place where the film is stretching to signify something beyond its capacity. This reaching for the infinite is precisely melodrama's function, and landscape provides one way of signifying that ineffable emotion.

Both the landscape and Tierney have a visual power that the film exploits at every possible turn. In the 1940s, Tierney was known as "the most beautiful woman in the world," and her spectacular beauty is matched only by the dazzling spectacle of the film's Technicolor landscapes. The expressive function of these landscapes (and of Tierney) is immediate and spectacular, not contemplative. Indeed, as Lefebvre has suggested, landscape's function

The front lawn of heaven

as spectacle can be compared with Laura Mulvey's well-traveled concept of woman as spectacle, which "throw[s] into sharp relief both the distinction between story and spectacle and the tension that it generates."[52] To return to Brooks again: "All these signs hence have a depth of symbolic meaning. We are not, however, asked to meditate upon their connotations, to plumb their depths . . . they are used virtually as pure signifiers, in that it is their spectacular, their visual, interaction that counts. Their very simplicity and exag-

geration permits such a use: they can be deployed in interplay and clash in such a manner that the struggle of moral entities is visible to the spectator."[53] The film dwells on Ellen's behavior in these magnificent landscapes as though it were a nature documentary exploring an exotic animal in its habitat. She remains alluring but alien throughout.

Location Shooting and Technicolor: Realism and Artifice

Leave Her to Heaven's location work was part of a larger trend in which Hollywood filmmakers began to take their cameras outside the studio more frequently during and especially after World War II. Figures are not available for the precise number of Hollywood films shot on location in the first fifteen years after the war, but the general trend is unmistakable. This tendency is often associated with film noir, although many important noirs (such as *The Big Sleep* [dir. Howard Hawks, US, 1946]) were shot entirely in the studio. In fact, the trend toward location work was occurring broadly across various different kinds of melodrama in the postwar era: *Duel in the Sun* (dir. King Vidor, US, 1946), *The Reckless Moment* (dir. Max Ophüls, US, 1949), *Ruby Gentry* (dir. King Vidor, US, 1952), *The Big Country* (dir. William Wyler, US, 1958), and *Home from the Hill* (dir. Vincente Minnelli, US, 1960) are just a few titles. Technicolor location shooting also began to be used in some musicals; *On the Town* (dir. Gene Kelly and Stanley Donen, US, 1949) is an interesting example. Outdoor settings were also important for postwar westerns, of course, particularly in films directed by Anthony Mann, André de Toth, and John Ford.

As this somewhat scattershot list of titles begins to indicate, outdoor settings became commonplace across a wide spectrum of American film production. Location shooting was not necessarily identified with any particular genre. Often in melodramas outdoor locations were justified in the narrative by a vacation or leisure pursuit undertaken by the main characters. Sometimes outdoor leisure pursuits functioned merely as backdrop elements: think of the fishing trip in Mexico in *The Hitch-Hiker* (dir. Ida Lupino, US, 1953), which the two hijacked main characters—both World War II

veterans—never get to enjoy. But at other times, outdoor settings become inextricably bound up with the narrative, as in the wilderness cabin setting of *Beyond the Forest* (dir. King Vidor, US, 1949), or the drowning scene in *A Place in the Sun* (dir. George Stevens, US, 1951). The broad-based nature of this shift outdoors is perhaps attributable to financial reasons as much as to the new taste for realism cultivated by 1940s documentary films and Italian neorealism. During the war, financial constraints in the film industry had hindered studio set construction, and some began to realize that location shooting could be cheaper than building studio sets.[54]

Despite this emergent trend, location shooting was still the exception rather than the norm at this time. Likewise, Technicolor was even more infrequently used in this era. Technicolor shooting greatly increased a film's production budget by anywhere from 10 to 30 percent or more, depending on the year (and the estimate), whereas a concomitant increase in box-office revenue was by no means guaranteed.[55] Therefore, during the years that three-color Technicolor reigned as the dominant color process in Hollywood (1935–53), it was used for A-pictures only, with big stars and the most renowned cinematographers, costumers, and production designers in employment. During these years of Technicolor's virtual monopoly over color production, studios had to rent the expensive Technicolor cameras rather than buy them, and these cameras were in high demand and short supply. In addition, studios were required to hire Technicolor's "color consultants" (such as Kalmus) to oversee the color design of each production. Despite the high costs and contractual company oversight, Technicolor production continued to increase in the 1940s (from fewer than twenty films per year at the beginning of the decade to forty films in 1949), but it was still an unusual practice.[56] It was not until the introduction of Eastmancolor's cheaper monopack color stock in the mid-1950s (and the subsequent introduction of other studio processes such as WarnerColor and TruColor) that color production began to make up a good percentage of Hollywood film production.[57] And it was not until television started broadcasting in color in the 1960s that color film production became ubiquitous and the color trend irreversible.

Given the exceptional nature of location shooting and Technicolor in this era, it follows that they were used together quite rarely. However, Twentieth Century–Fox became known for employing both strategies. *Leave Her to Heaven* was part of Zanuck's technologically forward-looking vision for Fox, which made more than seventy-five Technicolor pictures in the 1940s alone, a remarkable number given the cost increases involved. Between 1936 and 1954, nearly two-thirds of Hollywood's color films were made at Fox.[58] Some have argued that Fox's use of location shooting immediately after World War II stemmed in part from Zanuck's personal interest in realism, due to his experience in the US Army Signal Corps during the war where he assembled combat and training films using documentary footage. At the same time, while at Fox, Zanuck focused on Technicolor productions to a greater extent than his studio rivals did, and this interest is often credited to the mogul's showmanship. Thus a contradiction emerges between Zanuck the realist, who favored location shooting, and Zanuck the showman, who encouraged the fantastical effects of Technicolor.[59] For *Leave Her to Heaven*, an elaborate A-budget strategy was devised involving the usual trappings of stars and high production values, while location shooting and Technicolor set the film apart from others in 1945–46. The strategy paid off, and the film was praised for its "exceptionally eye-appealing" production design and color photography.[60] *Variety* correctly predicted that "lush production values so beautifully photographed in Technicolor assure soaring grosses."[61] Indeed, this is a film that may have found commercial success not only because of its stars and its story but also because of its technical qualities. This is a movie dominated by its mise-en-scène.

Leave Her to Heaven uses location shooting to create a generalized sense of the great outdoors. The narrative moves from one vivid exterior setting to another; however, none of the shooting locations were the actual places proclaimed diegetically by the film. For the Back of the Moon sequences set in Maine, the crew went to Bass Lake in central California. The sequences set diegetically in New Mexico were filmed in Sedona, Arizona. Scenes at Warm Springs, Georgia, were shot at Busch Gardens in Pasadena.[62] In addition, the film's opening sequence onboard a train traveling

through New Mexico features a landscape seen through the window that was shot in California's Mojave Desert. For some critics, this abundance of locations was not a praiseworthy attraction but a distraction: Howard Barnes of the *New York Herald Tribune* complained that the film contained "enough backgrounds to dress up a dozen pictures."[63]

There is, of course, one obvious reason for the kind of location work found in *Leave Her to Heaven*—media commentators today have called it the "stunt location." Simply put, it is cheaper to shoot in California than to ship the cast and crew to Maine. California's varied topography was, after all, one of the reasons the film industry relocated there in the 1910s. An old Hollywood saying nicely illustrates this attitude: "A tree is a tree and a rock is a rock! Shoot it in Griffith Park."[64] However, I am interested less in questions of budget than in the poetic effect of using one place to stand for another; rather than look at the history of actual locations in films, it seems more broadly useful to analyze how landscapes can function as fantasy spaces.[65] Certainly, audiences are well aware that films are often not shot where their story is set. As Ian Christie notes, an authentic sense of location "does not *require* literal pro-filmic accuracy."[66] I argue that this generalized use of location shooting can contribute to a film's sense of unreality, as Barnes's criticism above indicates. Indeed, because of the Technicolor, the exteriors in this film at times look as artificial as the interiors (an effect enhanced by the placement of what appear to be fake flowers and ferns around the Back of the Moon cabin). To be more precise, then, we should attend to how location shooting works simultaneously in two directions: it adds realism by harnessing indexical referents to the real world, but it does so in the service of creating a more believable mythic space for fictional narrative.

Unlike location shooting, which has always popularly been associated with realism (even though, as I am arguing, it can just as well signify a fantasy landscape), color film stock signified artificiality in the 1940s and 1950s. But this association did not happen overnight. According to Scott Higgins, Technicolor aesthetics were developed in several stages. At first, filmmakers aimed for a

"restrained mode" of color design, as demonstrated in films such as *The Trail of the Lonesome Pine* (dir. Henry Hathaway, US, 1936) that flourished from 1936 to 1938.[67] In this mode, color was meant to be an unobtrusive style element, underscoring the narrative action rather than upstaging it. In later years a more "assertive mode" of color design was developed in films like *The Wizard of Oz* (dir. Victor Fleming, US, 1939), in which color was placed "more boldly in the service of spectacle" (139). By the 1940s, color design was often associated with a more dynamic style, and a film such as *Leave Her to Heaven* fits into what Higgins calls a "catalogue aesthetic . . . offer[ing] a kind of *House and Garden* view of well-appointed interiors and perfectly matched costumes" (126). That location work was even more difficult in the 1940s and 1950s when shooting in color makes *Leave Her to Heaven* all the more unusual for 1945. Technicolor film stock was quite slow speed and thus less sensitive to light than the much faster black-and-white stock of the period. Therefore Technicolor shooting called for either extremely bright studio light (the temperature of the set on *The Wizard of Oz* often exceeded 100°F) or glaringly bright sunlight. Production stills of *Leave Her to Heaven* show many large reflective panels set up to intensify the sunlight during the shooting of the lake sequences.

Realism is a style that changes over time; likewise, the taste for a realist style waxes and wanes in critical approbation. As Barbara Klinger has shown, the critical taste of the postwar era favored a realist aesthetic. To the extent that adult dramas were able "to foreground the relevance of their social problems and stylistic verisimilitude," they were praised for their realism.[68] Those melodramas that employed seemingly nonrealist techniques such as color were associated with "the ugly quintessence of Hollywood commercialism" (76). In turn, these artificial style elements were associated with femininity. "The judgments against Sirk's films were heavily freighted by this kind of implicit equation of things female with the threatening and debilitating potentials of mass culture" (80). This echoes David Batchelor's argument not only that color itself has long been associated with femininity but also that "colour has been the object of extreme prejudice in Western culture . . . colour has been systematically marginalized, reviled,

diminished and degraded."[69] At a moment when color film still had an unstable meaning, the ambivalence of Sirk's critics underscores a deep cultural uncertainty.

The critical ambivalence about Sirk's use of color was preceded by a similarly ambivalent critical response to *Leave Her to Heaven*'s color. In this moment when location shooting seemed to mark a new measure of realism and color signified artifice, the meaning of color paired with location shooting was unstable.[70] Some reviewers praised the film's scenic qualities, whereas others found the film's scenery artificial. The renowned cinematographer Leon Shamroy won the Academy Award for Best Cinematography for his work on this film, indicating that within the film industry, the film's setting and color were considered an asset. Reviewers who appreciated the film's settings and cinematography tended to single out these qualities more than the film's story and performances, praising its "lush production values so beautifully photographed in Technicolor" or noting that "Shamroy's camera is ever master of the wealth of natural scenic splendors."[71] However, there were a number of critical detractors who disapproved of the film's style. Bosley Crowther of the *New York Times* was unimpressed, disparaging the film as "a piece of cheap fiction done up in Technicolor and expensive sets" and calling the sets "elaborate and gadgety."[72] Barnes disapproved of the film's style, sneering that "the sequences frequently take on the dullness of a color travelogue."[73]

Regardless of how the film was valued, all of these critics were attentive to its mise-en-scène as a cinematic element that rivaled the narrative in importance. What I find significant is the split opinion on the merits and value of Technicolor and location shooting. What for some was praiseworthy, for others was cheap and vulgar. Brooks writes that "melodrama's relation to realism is always oblique—it is tensed toward an exploitation of expression beyond. It insists that the ordinary may be the place for the instauration of significance. It tells us that in the right mirror, with the right degree of convexity, our lives matter."[74] Reviewers seem to have disagreed about how convex that mirror should be. This ambivalence in the film's reception mirrors the ambiguity of the film itself, which, as I have argued, at times validates Ellen's vibrant,

colorful nature and at times vilifies it. *Leave Her to Heaven* vacillates between celebrating and denouncing its fascination with color, nature, and femininity. Ultimately, the film rejects the "dangerous" version of all these terms, in the guise of Ellen, and validates the "safe" version, personified by Ruth.

From Heaven to Hell: Manichaean Space

Malcolm Andrews writes that "landscape in art tells us, or asks us to think about, where we belong."[75] As I contend, *Leave Her to Heaven*'s landscapes ask the viewer to consider a world in which dazzlingly strong, erotic women such as Ellen might reside. The film is decidedly ambivalent about a world that might contain such a creature, and that ambiguity is what makes it a fascinating text. The film contains so many contradictions that at times it seems inscrutable. In a reversal of the usual Hollywood formula, making this film coherent requires reading against the grain.

The film's treatment of pregnancy is particularly fascinating. Although Ellen is associated with nature and vitality throughout *Leave Her to Heaven*, when she becomes pregnant, she is distraught at the changes in her body and soon rejects the role of motherhood. Pregnancy renders Ellen trapped like a caged animal. Her entrapment is visualized quite literally when she watches Richard and Ruth from behind a picture window as they return from town after having shopped together for her baby's layette; in this scene we are given a number of shots from Ellen's perspective that seem to validate her jealousy. But any audience empathy for Ellen's position is undercut by what she does in response.

In another of the film's most memorable scenes, Ellen throws herself down the stairs of her family home to get rid of the unborn child she thinks has come between her and Richard.[76] Following her jealous observation of Ruth and Richard together, Ellen complains to Ruth that she feels unattractive while pregnant and says of her unborn baby, "I hate the little beast! I wish it would die!" By this time Ellen is already a murderer, but her exclamation (which proves that this "murder" is premeditated) seems intended to read as an even more shocking transgression. The docile housewife of

the earlier scene at Warm Springs has been transformed into a monstrous and clearly doomed figure: from fascinating "natural woman" to perversion of nature. And, significantly, this section of the film is set inside rather than in the grand outdoors. Once Ellen has voiced her hatred, she dons an alluring blue negligee and slippers, applies lipstick, and promptly stages her "accidental" fall down the staircase. The spectator is encouraged to feel only outrage as we learn that, while Ellen will recover, her fetus has died. Finally, in yet another blow to patriarchal values, the lost child, we discover, was a boy. Staged amid stifling chintz furniture and floral wallpaper rather than a magnificent wilderness landscape, stripped of any ambiguity, Ellen's villainy is absolute.

Aborting her unborn baby is one of several reversals in strategy that Ellen makes in the film. First she switches fiancés; next she nurtures Danny, only to kill him later; and then she gets pregnant to win Richard's love back, only to abort the child a few months later. All this back-and-forth renders Ellen incoherent, so that if viewers want to find meaning in this character, they have to come up with their own analysis. One interpretation, promoted in advertisements for the film, is that Ellen's jealousy has rendered her purely evil: "Hers was the deadliest of the seven deadly sins!" All these unexplained reversals in strategy have the effect of pulling audience impressions in contradictory directions at different moments. Central to the film's power is its ability to hold its spectator in an ambivalent position, sometimes validating Ellen's perspective and other times dismissing it as paranoia.

As the story progresses and Ellen becomes increasingly demonic, the audience is encouraged to scorn her murderous behavior. But at the same time, as the story proceeds, there is more and more truth to her suspicions about her husband's affection for Ruth. Ultimately, the film dispenses with its device of doubling female characters. With her death, Ellen is absented from the narrative entirely, and the film concludes with a trial scene that reasserts the traditional patriarchal order. Like the film's advertising campaign, this conclusion attempts to provide coherence and closure for the preceding events. However, neither the advertise-

ments nor the narrative closure can erase the deep contradictions of the film. In the only scholarly article previously published on this film, Marshall Deutelbaum argues that Ellen "mistakenly comes to believe that Harland has fallen in love with her step-sister, Ruth."[77] In fact, Ellen is not mistaken about this love at all, as we see at the film's conclusion. Ellen may have been psychotic, but she was correct: Ruth publicly confesses that she loves Richard during her trial, and the final scene shows Richard returning home to Ruth, who has now taken Ellen's place at Back of the Moon. In contrast to Deutelbaum, I argue that the film's conclusion validates Ellen's jealousy but not her actions. In this way, the film leaves the audience with a curious ambivalence about the justice it dispenses.

As Ruth and Richard are wordlessly reunited at Back of the Moon in the film's final shots, we are reminded of the more astonishing and terrible scenes with Ellen in this same location. As the sun sets, the brilliance goes out of the landscape, and it seems that heaven's front lawn has been trimmed and fumigated. As in so many women's films, the work of this film is to render the female protagonist's desires grotesque and to destroy her in the end. But like so many other melodramas, what remains is less a sense of Ellen's punishment than a memory of her mighty presence before her demise: her intense vitality, her evil behavior, and, above all, her transcendent habitat combine to render Ellen, like a creature of nature, frighteningly fabulous.

Notes

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1. Eric Avila, "The Spectacle of Urban Blight: Hollywood's Rendition of a Black Los Angeles," in *Popular Culture in the Age of White Flight: Fear and Fantasy in Suburban Los Angeles* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004), 66.

2. On noir and the city, see Ed Dimendberg, *Film Noir and the Spaces of Modernity* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004); Frank Krutnik, "Something More than Night: Tales of the Noir City," in *The Cinematic City*, ed. David B. Clarke (New York: Routledge, 1997), 83–109; Nicholas Christopher, *Somewhere in the Night: Film Noir and the American City* (New York: Free Press, 1997); Eddie Muller, *Dark City: The Lost World of Film Noir* (New York: St. Martin's, 1998); Nathaniel Rich, *San Francisco Noir: The City in Film Noir from 1940 to the Present* (New York: Little Bookroom, 2005); Paul Arthur, "Los Angeles as Scene of the Crime," *Film Comment* 32, no. 4 (1996): 20–26; and Spencer Selby, *Dark City: The Film Noir* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 1984). See also Andrew Webber and Emma Wilson, eds., *Cities in Transition: The Moving Image and the Modern Metropolis* (London: Wallflower, 2007); and Alan Marcus and Dietrich Neumann, eds., *Visualizing the City* (New York: Routledge, 2007). On postwar melodrama and the suburbs, see R. D. McNiven, "The Middle-Class American Home of the Fifties," *Cinema Journal* 22, no. 4 (1983): 38–57; Mary Beth Haralovich, "*All That Heaven Allows*: Color, Narrative Space, and Melodrama," in *Close Viewings: An Anthology of New Film Criticism*, ed. Peter Lehman (Tallahassee: Florida State University Press, 1990), 57–72; Thomas Sobchack, "Interiors: The Space of Melodrama," in *Locales in American Popular Film*, vol. 4 of *Beyond the Stars: Studies in American Popular Film*, ed. Paul Loukides and Linda K. Fuller (Bowling Green, OH: Bowling Green State University Popular Press, 1993), 261–77; Christine Gledhill, ed., *Home Is Where the Heart Is: Studies in Melodrama and the Woman's Film* (London: British Film Institute, 2002); Kathleen Anne McHugh, *American Domesticity: From How-to Manual to Hollywood Melodrama* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999); and Emmanuel Levy, *Small-Town America in Film: The Decline and Fall of Community* (New York: Continuum, 1991).

3. On landscape in early nonfiction film, see Jennifer Peterson, *Education in the School of Dreams: Travelogues and Early Nonfiction Film* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, forthcoming).

4. See Thomas Doherty, "Documenting the 1940s," in *Boom and Bust: American Cinema in the 1940s*, ed. Thomas Schatz (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), 417; Steven N. Lipkin, "Real Emotional Logic: Persuasive Strategies in Docudrama," *Cinema Journal* 38, no. 4 (1999): 68–85; and Mark Shiel, *Italian*

Neorealism: Rebuilding the Cinematic City (London: Wallflower, 2006).

5. Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring* (1962; repr., Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2002) is often considered the major catalyst for the 1960s environmental movement. "The environmental reappraisal triggered by *Silent Spring* was so profound that several writers have compared Carson's political impact to that of Harriet Beecher Stowe." Daniel G. Payne, *Voices in the Wilderness: American Nature Writing and Environmental Politics* (Hanover, NH: University Press of New England, 1996), 137.

6. John A. Jakle, *The Tourist: Travel in Twentieth-Century North America* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1985), 209.

7. Only *The Best Years of Our Lives* (dir. William Wyler, US, 1946) had a greater domestic rental revenue, $11.5 million. See *The Numbers*, www.the-numbers.com/movies/1946/0BEYE.php (accessed 9 April 2010).

8. It is worth remembering that 1946 was the year of the highest movie attendance in US history, when measured proportionately. According to one account, *Leave Her to Heaven* earned $5.5 million in domestic rentals and $2.7 million in foreign rentals in 1946, placing it in "the number one industry-wide spot" for profits. Aubrey Solomon, *Twentieth Century–Fox: A Corporate and Financial History* (Metuchen, NJ: Scarecrow Press, 1988), 65. According to another estimate, *The Bells of St. Mary's* (dir. Leo McCarey, US, 1945) earned a higher domestic rental revenue in 1946 of $8 million, but this account does not take foreign rentals into consideration; also, this alternate estimate lists rentals for *Leave Her to Heaven* at $5.75 million. Mike Chopra-Gant, *Hollywood Genres and Postwar America: Masculinity, Family, and Nation in Popular Movies and Film Noir* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2006), 18.

9. Roderick Frazier Nash, *Wilderness and the American Mind*, 4th ed. (1967; New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2001), 6.

10. Although Sirk remade several Stahl films, he claimed not to have watched the Stahl versions first. See Jon Halliday, *Sirk on Sirk: Interviews with Jon Halliday* (New York: Viking, 1972).

11. Thomas Elsaesser, "Tales of Sound and Fury: Observations on the Family Melodrama," in Gledhill, *Home*, 43–69.

12. Michael Renov, *Hollywood's Wartime Woman: Representation and Ideology* (Ann Arbor, MI: UMI, 1988), 174.

13. In describing his own murder at the hands of his brother, who quickly married his wife, Gertrude, after his death, the ghost of Hamlet's father urges Hamlet to avenge his murder, but not to punish Gertrude for remarrying so quickly. "Leave her to heaven, and to those thorns that in her bosom lodge to prick and sting her." William Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, in *The Riverside Shakespeare*, ed. G. Blakemore Evans (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1974), 1150. The implication is that Queen Gertrude will be punished by her conscience in the afterlife. The use of this quotation as the title of the film (and novel) equates Ellen with Queen Gertrude and her sexual guilt.

14. See Joan Shelley Rubin, *The Making of Middlebrow Culture* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1992).

15. See Jeanine Basinger, *A Woman's View: How Hollywood Spoke to Women, 1930–1960* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1993), 83–113; see also Renov, *Hollywood's Wartime Woman*, 174–82.

16. Darryl F. Zanuck to Jules Furthman, 12 April 1947, reprinted in *Memo from Darryl F. Zanuck: The Golden Years at Twentieth Century–Fox*, ed. Rudy Behlmer (New York: Grove, 1993), 127.

17. Shooting took place in spring 1945, and editing was completed in the summer. Victory over Japan (V-J) day occurred on 15 August 1945, four months before the film's release.

18. Renov, *Hollywood's Wartime Woman*, 47.

19. Jakle, *Tourist*, 186.

20. George Morris, "John M. Stahl: The Man Who Understood Women," *Film Comment* 13, no. 3 (1977): 26.

21. Nash, *Wilderness*; Leo Marx, *The Machine in the Garden: Technology and the Pastoral Ideal in America* (1964; repr., New York: Oxford University Press, 2000). For one alternative to Nash's and Marx's influential studies of the idea of wilderness in US culture, see Max Oelschlaeger, *The Idea of Wilderness: From Prehistory to the Age of Ecology* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1991).

22. Peter Brooks, *The Melodramatic Imagination: Balzac, Henry James, Melodrama, and the Mode of Excess* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1976), 40, 42.

23. A. W., "Niagara Falls Vies with Marilyn Monroe," *New York Times*, 22 January 1953.

24. Richard Dyer, *Heavenly Bodies: Film Stars and Society* (London: British Film Institute, 1986), 32.

25. Lisa Cohen, "The Horizontal Walk: Marilyn Monroe, CinemaScope, and Sexuality," *Yale Journal of Criticism* 11, no. 1 (1998): 261.

26. The film's Production Code Administration analysis chart classifies it as a "Drama-Psychological," and *Variety* called it a "Drama." Motion Picture Association of America Production Code Administration Files, Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences, Margaret Herrick Library, Beverly Hills, CA (hereafter cited as AMPAS MPAA); "*Leave Her to Heaven*," *Variety*, 20 December 1945. See also Steve Neale, "Melo Talk: On the Meaning and Use of the Term 'Melodrama' in the American Trade Press," *Velvet Light Trap* 32 (1993): 74.

27. Brog, review of *Leave Her to Heaven*, *Variety*, 2 January 1946.

28. Jack D. Grant, "*Leave Her to Heaven* Fine, Powerful, Emotional Pic," *Hollywood Reporter*, 20 December 1945.

29. Gene Tierney, with Mickey Herskowitz, *Self-Portrait* (New York: Wyden Books, 1979), 137. Tierney was nominated for an Oscar for this role but lost to Joan Crawford, who won for *Mildred Pierce* (dir. Michael Curtiz, US, 1945).

30. There were a few other Technicolor noirs in the genre's classic cycle, such as *Desert Fury* (dir. Lewis Allen, US, 1947) and *Slightly Scarlet* (dir. Allan Dwan, US, 1956); the latter film was printed on Technicolor film stock but did not use the original three-strip Technicolor cameras, which were phased out in 1955.

31. See, for example, Glenn Erickson, review of *Leave Her to Heaven*, DVD Savant Review, www.dvdtalk.com/dvdsavant/s1486her.html (accessed 9 April 2010).

32. For a compendium of recent reviews, see "John M. Stahl's *Leave Her to Heaven*: New 35mm Restoration," 13 March 2009, Film Forum, filmforum.org/films/leave.html.

33. For a useful overview of approaches to film genre (with an emphasis on melodrama), see Christine Gledhill, "Rethinking Genre," in *Reinventing Film Studies*, ed. Christine Gledhill and Linda Williams (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000),

221–43. See also Ben Singer, *Melodrama and Modernity: Early Sensational Cinema and Its Contexts* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001); and Neale, "Melo Talk."

34. Linda Williams, *Playing the Race Card: Melodramas of Black and White from Uncle Tom to O. J. Simpson* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2001), 16–17.

35. Williams, *Playing the Race Card*, 23.

36. Cynthia Erb, *Tracking King Kong: A Hollywood Icon in World Culture* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1998).

37. Richard Maltby, "'A Brief Romantic Interlude': Dick and Jane Go to 3½ Seconds of the Classical Hollywood Cinema," in *Post-theory: Reconstructing Film Studies*, ed. David Bordwell and Noël Carroll (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1996), 436.

38. Rick Altman, *Film/Genre* (London: British Film Institute, 1999), 16.

39. Rick Altman, "Dickens, Griffith, and Film Theory Today," in *Classical Hollywood Narrative: The Paradigm Wars*, ed. Jane Gaines (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1992), 34–35. This article is a response to the groundbreaking 1977 essay by Kristin Thompson, "The Concept of Cinematic Excess," in *Narrative, Apparatus, Ideology: A Film Theory Reader*, ed. Philip Rosen (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986), 130–42 (originally published in *Ciné-Tracts*, no. 2, (1977): 54–63.

40. Mary Anne Doane, *The Desire to Desire: The Woman's Film of the 1940s* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987).

41. Brooks, *Melodramatic Imagination*, 48.

42. Sergei Eisenstein, *Nonindifferent Nature*, trans. Herbert Marshall (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 217.

43. Martin Lefebvre, ed., introduction to *Landscape and Film* (New York: Routledge, 2006), xii n2.

44. Brooks, *Melodramatic Imagination*, 42.

45. Eisenstein, *Nonindifferent Nature*, 218.

46. Natalie Kalmus, "Color Consciousness," *Journal of the Society of Motion Picture Engineers*, August 1935, 145, quoted in Scott Higgins, *Harnessing the Technicolor Rainbow: Color Design in the 1930s* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2007), 40.

47. Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Judgment* (1790), trans. Werner S. Pluhar (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1987), 99.

48. Marjorie Hope Nicolson, *Mountain Gloom and Mountain Glory: The Development of the Aesthetics of the Infinite* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1959), 2. Nicolson's classic study of nature and aesthetics opens with a line from one of the most important nineteenth-century poems about travel, written by Byron and also used in this article's first epigraph. See Baron George Gordon Byron, *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* (Chicago: W. B. Conkey, 1900), canto 3, 166.

49. Nicolson, *Mountain Gloom and Mountain Glory*, 315.

50. Such films include *All That Heaven Allows*, *Heaven Knows Mr. Allison*, and *Heaven Can Wait*. A version of *Heaven Can Wait* (dir. Ernst Lubitsch, US, 1943), another Technicolor film from Fox starring Tierney, was made a year before *Leave Her to Heaven*.

51. Harry Brand, Twentieth Century–Fox Publicity Department, synopsis of *Leave Her to Heaven*, AMPAS MPAA, 3.

52. Martin Lefebvre, "Between Setting and Landscape in Cinema," in *Landscape and Film*, 28–29. Lefebvre is referring to Laura Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," *Screen* 16, no. 3 (1975): 6–18.

53. Brooks, *Melodramatic Imagination*, 28.

54. For example, in May 1942 the War Production Board limited set construction to a cost of $5,000 per film, in an effort to conserve materials for the war effort. "The studios devised methods of recycling and constructing new sets within these guidelines and also increased location shooting in 1942 (Hitchcock, for example, shot *Shadow of a Doubt* entirely on location)." Schatz, *Boom and Bust*, 144. See also Solomon, *Twentieth Century–Fox*, 60; and William Lafferty, "A Reappraisal of the Semi-documentary in Hollywood, 1945–1948," *Velvet Light Trap*, no. 20 (1983): 22–26.

55. Gorham Kindem, "Hollywood's Conversion to Color: The Technical, Economic, and Aesthetic Factors," in *The American Movie Industry: The Business of Motion Pictures*, ed. Gorham Kindem (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1982), 153–54.

56. Steve Neale, *Cinema and Technology: Image, Sound, Color* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1985), 137.

57. Kindem, "Hollywood's Conversion to Color," 156; Neale, *Cinema and Technology*, 143. This percentage still fluctuated, from 51 percent in 1955 to 25 percent in 1958.

58. George F. Custen, *Twentieth Century's Fox: Darryl F. Zanuck and the Culture of Hollywood* (New York: Basic Books, 1997), 200.

59. Zanuck wanted *How Green Was My Valley* (dir. John Ford, US, 1941) to be shot on location in Wales in Technicolor, but because of World War II bombing in Wales, he had to settle for a Malibu Canyon location and ultimately used black-and-white film stock. Custen, *Twentieth Century's Fox*, 242.

60. Brog, review of *Leave Her to Heaven*, *Variety*, 2 January 1946.

61. "*Leave Her To Heaven*," *Variety*, 20 December 1945.

62. Busch Gardens' Pasadena location was defunct in 1945, but the former amusement park (1905–37) was a frequent location for movie shoots, including *It Happened One Night* (dir. Frank Capra, US, 1934) and *Gone with the Wind* (dir. Victor Fleming, US, 1939). See Joan Cohen, program note, n.d., *Leave Her to Heaven* production file, Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences, Margaret Herrick Library collection. In his audio commentary for the 2005 DVD release, Hickman (who played Danny) says that while he thinks some exterior shots of Warm Springs may have been taken by a second-unit crew in Georgia, the bulk of this part of the film was shot on the Fox back lot. However, as is the case with many such personal reminiscences, this information may not be entirely correct.

63. Howard Barnes, *"Leave Her to Heaven," New York Herald Tribune,* 26 December 1945.

64. I first heard this aphorism of old Hollywood when I interviewed the veteran MGM film editor Ralph Winters for the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences. See Jennifer Peterson, "An Oral History with Ralph Winters" (Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences Oral History Program, Margaret Herrick Library, Beverly Hills, CA, 2001), 297. As I later discovered, the saying is sometimes attributed to the producer Abe Stern, and sometimes to Cecil B. DeMille, but its provenance remains uncertain. King Vidor used the phrase for the title and

epigraph of his autobiography, but he does not explain its origins. See King Vidor, *A Tree Is a Tree* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1952).

65. Thus far work on location shooting has concentrated on the depiction of specific regions or cities (especially San Francisco and Los Angeles). See Jeff Kraft and Aaron Leventhal, *Footsteps in the Fog: Alfred Hitchcock's San Francisco* (Santa Monica, CA: Santa Monica Press, 2002); and Alain Silver and James Ursini, *L.A. Noir: The City as Character* (Santa Monica, CA: Santa Monica Press, 2005). For a cinematic exploration of this subject, see the excellent documentary by Thom Andersen, *Los Angeles Plays Itself* (US, 2003). One of the few articles to deal with location shooting as a concept (and not just a historical case study) is Geoffrey Nowell-Smith, "Cities: Real and Imagined," in *Cinema and the City: Film and Urban Societies in a Global Context*, ed. Mark Shiel and Tony Fitzmaurice (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2001), 99–108.

66. Ian Christie, "Landscape and 'Location': Reading Filmic Space Historically," *Rethinking History* 4 (2000): 172.

67. Higgins, *Harnessing the Technicolor Rainbow*, 76.

68. Barbara Klinger, *Melodrama and Meaning: History, Culture, and the Films of Douglas Sirk* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994), 76.

69. David Batchelor, *Chromophobia* (London: Reaktion Books, 2000), 22.

70. As Sarah Street has remarked, there seems to be a key connection between the use of color and locale in film, related to the otherness and exoticism of each. Sarah Street, "Exporting the Rainbow: Technicolor Films in Britain" (paper presented at the Society for Cinema and Media Studies conference, Vancouver, Canada, 3 March 2006).

71. "*Leave Her to Heaven*," *Variety*, 20 December 1945; Grant, "*Leave Her to Heaven*." See also Brog, review of *Leave Her to Heaven*.

72. Bosley Crowther, "Six New Films Arrive on the Holiday in Midtown Houses—Gene Tierney Appears in 'Leave Her to Heaven' at Roxy," *New York Times*, 26 December 1945.

73. Barnes, "*Leave Her to Heaven*."

74. Brooks, *Melodramatic Imagination*, ix.

75. Malcolm Andrews, *Landscape and Western Art* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 8.

76. Self-induced abortions occur in other melodramas of the period, as when Bette Davis throws herself down the side of a mountain in *Beyond the Forest*. Of course, an even more famous example of the stair-falling-induced abortion occurs in *Gone with the Wind*.

77. Marshall Deutelbaum, "Costuming and the Color System of *Leave Her to Heaven*," in *Color: The Film Reader*, ed. Angela Dalle Vacche and Brian Price (New York: Routledge, 2006), 162.

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