

**How Dare You, Greider –
Justifications of patricide in Andreas Prochaska’s *The Dark Valley***

The greatest mystery of a Western movie is the protagonist himself. His external traits are simple: he is a tall, dark stranger who appears out of nowhere. He sports a poker face, an emotional baggage of the past, and a gun filled with bullets; after a quick assessment, the locals know better than to meddle with his business. The central conflict of a Western also involves a resident goon who has the utmost willingness to perpetuate his status as the most authoritative man of the town and make anyone who dares defy him pay. By law, these two forces – the hero and the villain – must clash and as a result, the evildoer must perish. But most importantly, in the process of eliminating the enemy, the hero might immerse himself in dirt and perform shady deeds, but he must never compromise his “code of honour”. Point being made, the remarkable, grisly, and Western-like morality of Greider in the movie *The Dark Valley* (2014) is tried by the act of patricide – a patricide which leaves a whole village fatherless. Can such an exploit be defended by the principles of a Western hero?

Let us first establish the audience-centred and historical background of Greider’s evaluation. Despite *The Dark Valley*’s Eurowestern milieu, the protagonist himself comes from America. As Hollywood accentuated so, one of the most cherished qualities of an American hero is his freedom (granted by the relevant Amendments of the Bill of Rights). Albeit, to what extent he allows his freedom to stretch, that is, how much he violates others’ rights, is up to a personal evaluation – the viewer decides whether the character’s deeds and goals are sympathy-inducing. The examination is based on the three-level construct of recognition, alignment, and allegiance. Recognition is basically processing the protagonist as a sentient being, thus eliciting emotional engagement with the character. The next level is where the working of the mind of the character is interpreted, followed by a moral assessment. If the character passes the test, the status of allegiance is reached. Given the hero, Greider’s records, his figure’s moral judgement is definitely a fascinating case. For that purpose, I will scrutinize key scenes from the first act of the film from the viewpoint of these three levels.

Greider is given a trademark Western introductory scene: he rides on horseback to a remote land. He appears during establishing shots ushering in the snow-capped peaks of the

Alps. His face is carefully omitted; he is firstly described through his boots and horses – he certainly has the external qualifications of a Western hero. This technique accommodates us to the perspective of the Brenners who are seen examining him from the distance. The protagonist remains an observer up until the twentieth minute mark when he accompanies Luzi to the inn to obtain supplies. There he encounters some Brenners; Greider tries to intervene when they intimidate Luzi and later refuses a drink from the clan. In return, they tackle him to the ground and force him to drink. Their aim is to gain control over him; first by indebting him with the drink, then by sheer brutal force. So far, his withdrawn nature was not much alluring, but the inn-scene succeeds in drawing in the viewer. The ruthless masculinity the Brenners profess as opposed to Greider's collected bearing convinces one to root for the ostensibly weaker character. By using this tactic instead of having a physically strong main hero shows an interesting twist of the Western hero-character; his perseverance, wits, and intuition are his greatest weapons, not his masculinity. Allegiance is forged upon the fact that even if Greider intrudes the fake peace of the village with his revenge, he is not a bully. It is best expressed by his departure after all is done. He would have every right to rule the village based on his origin; his mother lived there and he killed his predecessor – his father – along with any other possible heir to the power. All the same, he is a principled Western hero who does not act on a tempting feasibility.

His evaluation would not have been conceivable in the 20th century, since 1930 saw the creation of the Hays code, the foundation of American motion picture production principles (the forerunner of nowadays' ranking systems). Its creators instigated the responsible conduct of all films, regarding their effects on society: "No picture shall be produced that will lower the moral standards of those who see it. Hence the sympathy of the audience should never be thrown to the side of crime, wrongdoing, evil or sin." (Artsreformation.com). Therefore, 30's and 40's Westerns featured heroes who were never seen "smoking, lying, drinking, swearing, having sex, or gambling" (Filmsite.org), but it was only so long before grittier characters started to gain ground. The present relevance of the aforementioned traits is the similarity to Greider's own self-discipline; he is never shown indulging himself. He is bound by almost otherworldly perseverance which allows for no rest. The violation of another Hays code "Revenge in modern times shall not be justified." (Artsreformation.com), however, assures that Greider's character could not have made it to the big screen those days – incidentally, the certification for *The Dark Valley* is 12 in Germany and 16 in Switzerland.

Indeed, regardless of his lacking masculinity, Greider still can be every inch the ruthless, unstoppable, and independent warrior a Western desires, but his part in the movie extends to other directions as well. Appealing to the significance of American individuality, Greider is a daguerrean artist – a travelling photographer. He liberates the villagers in the literal sense with displaying violence, but also figuratively with his camera. The most fitting example is the portrait he takes of Luzi and Lukas. Capturing them on photo before the nuptials preserves a state of innocence: their relationship is not yet spoiled by the Brenners. It is curious to note that in a restrained sense, Greider delivers liberation to Luzi, or at least Luzi's copy on the picture. With such a solid effort, Luzi attempts to be as free as she can muster and agreeably, her achievement is still greater than those around her. However, let us examine the nature of photography. It takes a passive subject stationed in front of the camera to create a reproduction of reality. The couple is not allowed to move, otherwise the product is a failure. Ironic as it is, it is possibly the most passive way of protesting for Luzi, thus in keeping with the submissive demeanour of the villagers. The importance of memories evokes the imagery of "mise en abyme", a picture within a picture; Greider in his role as a diegetic photographer shoots pictures of Luzi, where the frame of the movie serves as the present and the second frame, that is, the photograph functions as a gateway to the past. The portrait of Luzi and Lukas is given a different meaning than that of Greider's other photographs, especially his mother's: paradoxically, it is a past that can be altered in the present. The tool of change, at any rate, is Greider.

Luzi's introductory words "there are things that should not be forgotten" are highlighted by the appearance of the camera. From the moment it appears, it registers the circumstances of the villagers' lives – they became a preserved memory. Accordingly, Oliver Wendell Holmes proclaimed photographs to be "a mirror with a memory" in 1839. What is particularly gripping about this quotation is that Old Brenner references this in the film. On the one hand, it could be a mere homage to Holmes. On the other hand, the village chief's presumed familiarity with contemporary technical advancement would create an intriguing discrepancy with the oppressing rule he exerts over his people.

Consequently, another aspect from which Greider is a just Western hero is the state of the society he enters. For if his qualities are to be measured, then they should be measured on the ground of the village standard. The very first occasion when he is confronted by the Brenner clan is resolved by introducing Greider's livelihood: photography. Their reaction is

utter bewilderment – Luzi, his host's daughter, expresses the stupefying effect of Greider's camera: "...none of Brenner's sons said a word. No one expected anything like that." (8:38). Though the distinction between Greider and the villagers is not an outstanding one, it illustrates how detached the village is from the outside. They are suspicious, reserved, and most of all, static; with the exception of the leaders, of course, who do not hesitate to impose their will on the crowd. The Brenner's productivity is what clenches the residents; provided they remain silent and obedient, they are given what they need for their survival. Apparently, the stagnant disposition criminalizes every woman and man, since they tolerate the raping tendencies of their leaders.

There are direct attestations of the locals' static faithfulness. At 14:45, Luzi's mother informs Greider that "Brenner makes all the rules up here, but he also takes care of us." Ostensibly her aim seems to be to educate Greider who is an outsider, but it is clear that she utters the words to remind Luzi and herself of the fact. They feel helpless and unaided, even so since Luzi lost his father and brother which is the reason why Luzi prompts Lukas, his fiancé, to "do something" before the wedding. The most striking example of how rotten the leading cult of the Brenner is the scene of the wedding ceremony of Luzi and Lukas. This scene proves that the Brenners sets up the pretense of the justification coming from a higher power. The village priest, Breiser, recites a blatant parable to further distress the couple: "Holy Mary says 'Even if He uses my womb, I will not protest for he is One who knows better than I'" (55:00). Now, there are many levels on which his speech is immoral. Firstly, Breiser is a loyal henchmen of Old Brenner which is clearly not in synch with his presumed calling. Additionally, he was present when Greider's father was tortured by crucifixion, a punishment for hiding away with Greider's mother. Secondly, he associates Brenner with God, the almighty leader of the community to support his intrusive means since whatever he may do is for the good of the people. Thirdly, let us consider this from a feminist view. Breiser objectifies women and plants the seed of self-doubt in their heads. Are they to defy the local "god's" will? No one tries to put an end the sexual abuse of the Brenners, since they see it as a twisted rite of passage for young women.

At the end of the movie, Luzi' concludes by announcing "freedom is a gift not everyone likes to receive". After the events of the movie, she herself sees her role as the passive receiver – her freedom was granted by Greider. The idea of freedom being the result of a passive process is poles apart from the American understanding of liberty. Benjamin Franklin stated "Freedom is not a gift bestowed upon us by other men, but a right that

belongs to us by the laws of God and nature.” (qtd. in Gary Galles’ article), an idea alien to the villagers as the women could not even decide for themselves whose child they want to give birth to. More vehemently worded, Franklin regarded those who did not achieve freedom by their own means as those unworthy of it “They that can give up essential liberty to obtain a little temporary safety, deserve neither liberty or safety” (qtd. in Gary Galles’ article). Unfortunately, the villagers bargained for shelter and gave up their independence; the grandparents of Greider practically sold his mother to Brenner owing to their hunger.

Accordingly, the next step is to prove Greider is eligible for being the positive hero of the story. What makes Greider’s intentions obscure at first is the absence of a straightforward exposition. At the outset he is presented ascending to the village, rendering his past unknown – an “in medias res” start. After grim implications, the reveal of his history comes in one piece in the church scene. It is a classic Western trope to conceal the protagonist’s background to boost pressure and guarantee ultimate catharsis. Suiting the plot of *The Dark Valley* to Joseph Campbell’s “monomyth”, it appears that the departure and return phase is mostly omitted and the focus is on the journey or “initiation”. Greider does pass through the following stages: Meeting with the Goddess, Woman as a Temptress, Atonement with the Father, Apotheosis, and the Ultimate Boon. With this in mind, let us go through the plot step by step.

Firstly, Greider is handed over to the care of Luzi, a local maiden. Her prearranged fate contributes to the hero’s determination of abolishing the Brenners’ despotic rule and also offers a fine occasion for him to take a stand. She is a damsel in distress whose well-being is to be protected by the protagonist, giving him a reason (or excuse) to fight for. Greider puts up a stark fight, eliminating many enemies, but then he encounters the innkeeper’s wife. She is not a temptress in the original approach; she is a greedy old crone. Notwithstanding, Greider finds himself unable to punish her for exposing Greider’s parents to the wrath of the Brenner clan. She shakes him in his purpose; his code of honour does not permit torture, particularly the torture of an aged woman. The same issue arises when the hero finally makes it to Old Brenner. Greider’s tears of atonement emphasize the need for catharsis: he can at last finish his quest, whatever it takes. Definitely, the closure of his mission takes its toll on him: he reaches the stage of Apotheosis. In this case, it is rather a form of purification, not an actual transcending to another level, or taking up the position of the village chief. He barely survives three weeks of severe illness, ergo his recovery is an improved state. Last but not

least, the liberation of the village compares with the Ultimate Boon, since the objective of Greider's vendetta is accomplished, with the residents left to fend for themselves. The feat of patricide left the entire village fatherless, too, which results in a half-finished endnote.

Moreover, a lot would end up unfinished if it not were for the "supernatural aid", a talisman that bestows great endurance upon Greider. Supernatural here rather puts emphasis on his uttermost perseverance to accomplish his task which is inspired by the presence of the talisman. He in fact has two of said aids: the pendant keepsake of Greider's mother and the metronome. The pendant is a direct link to the past, a constant reminder of the sins that made her run away. What should not be forgotten is remembered by virtue of photography. Turning to the metronome, it is designated to estimate the camera's exposure time, but it has a more delicate role. It does not only regulate the pace for a machine; it sets the rhythm for Greider each time he desires adjustment, mainly before falling asleep. The most noteworthy utilization occurs when Greider is desperately grasping for life after receiving critical wounds. Luzi swipes the hand of the metronome into motion and Greider's feverish respiration thereupon eases into steady breathing, mimicking the instrument's beat. Inarguably, his sole existence relies upon the benefits of his supernatural aids.

Lastly, I would like to pay special attention to *The Dark Valley's* two featured songs, "Sinnerman" and "How Dare You?", taking into account what they impart to the character of the protagonist. The latter with its accordion-based theme is more authentic in the Alps-situated film than the former, but the common ground is their melancholic tune and subject. In summary, they stress the futility of escape since fate prevails. "Sinnerman" holds firm relevance to the plot; the two instances when it plays non-diegetically compose a frame structure. The song originates from African-American spiritual roots, but the two covers germane to the discussion are from two European performers, One Two Three Cheers and a Tiger and Clara Luzia. Clara Luzia's lyrics include the line "Sinnerman is running for shelter", pertaining to the outset. Greider is advancing towards the village and the song produces the ambiance required to convey the message of the scene: he is someone who seeks his own redemption. The One Two Three Cheers And A Tiger version backs up the closure with its differing lyrics: "Run to the valley, the valley won't hold you". He fulfilled his task and has no place among the mountains anymore. Both songs add heroic measure to Greider's quest, in essence turning him into the subject of folk music. As to the distinct message of Steaming Satellites' "How Dare You", let me analyse the first line: "Why don't we just build

another castle in the sky and shake our hands”. On the one hand, the idiomatic interpretation of “build another castle in the sky” defines an unattainable vision. Judging the thrilling scene in which it plays, it could mean that Greider’s plan of defeating the Brenners is insurmountable. The second verse incorporates “I am sure that diamonds kill you anyway” with a focus on diamonds which reinforces the aforesaid inexpediency bearing in mind the rarity of diamonds. On the other hand, if the “build another castle in the sky” is scrutinized while thinking outside of the box – mainly by separating “castle” and “sky” –, one might draw intriguing conclusions. The castle symbolizes the village which is fortified with the walls the Brenners erected with imperious will. The Brenners self-appointedly decide who comes and goes, like the villains disguised as settlers in Western movies. Sky indicates the altitude of the Alps; indeed, the village is almost up in the sky. Upon entrapping the villagers, the Brenners “shake their hands” and enjoy the power they wield. In the end, though, “diamonds” kill them for their greediness (which diamond represents) exceeded many limits: they controlled a whole village. Greider is the saviour in this scenario who bids his goodbye, that is, succeeds in his revenge. He single-handedly overthrows the rule of a father figure an entire population worshipped, but feared. Greider is the lone cowboy and Old Brenner is the sheriff in town; *The Dark Valley*, its protagonist, and his code of honour stay as true to Western movies as possible.

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Filmography:

The Dark Valley. dir. Andreas Prochaska. Films Distribution. 2014.