

**Rebel Yells: Genre Hybridity and Irishness
in Garth Ennis & Steve Dillon's Preacher**

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For those readers who are unfamiliar with Preacher, a brief synopsis has been provided in an Appendix at the end of this text.

Splatterpunk Western; religious satire; treatise on gender politics; philosophical meditation on the nature of good versus evil; shit-kicking romp through the heartlands of America - Garth Ennis and Steve Dillon's Preacher covered more ideological ground in its sixty-six issues than any other comic of its time. Running from 1995 to 2000, the story of Jesse Custer - reluctant man of god and even more reluctant carrier of the demon/angel hybrid Genesis - marked a step up for D.C.'s adult comic imprint Vertigo in terms of sex, violence and blasphemy and would become the standard by which future titles were judged. (1) Ostensibly a hero's journey beginning and ending in the great state of Texas, Ennis & Dillon's tale is an exhilarating saga of petty angels, failed suicides, redneck intolerance, international conspiracies, an insecure God and occasional meetings with The Duke. But while the iconography is pure Americana, the ideological engine of the story is a debate on the nature of faith, with a lilting accent hailing all the way from Belfast. The secret of Preacher's success, it will be argued, is its outsiders' perspective; a perspective which allows a free and easy splicing of the traditional Western with old school Gothic; all bound together with a double helix of the arcane. While its title hearkens back to simpler times on the frontier and its historical interludes originate from the Old West, the Vietnam War and the Irish Diaspora; the mechanics of Ennis & Dillon's diegesis is distinctly Irish in its construction of premise and character. As Joe R. Lansdale put it "there aren't two just like it." (2) It is this uniqueness of vision and style coming from Preacher's unifying Irish component that comes under examination here.

Beginning his writing career with Fleetway Publications' challenging hardened anthology Crisis, Garth Ennis' earliest published work Troubled Souls marked the first of a number of collaborations with artist John McCrae. Appearing in 1989 (and published as a collected work in 1990) Ennis' drama of a young Catholic pressed into service with the IRA caught the interest of editor Steve MacManus, who was drawn to it as a story set in Northern Ireland - at the time, uncharted territory for the magazine and a site of contemporary tensions sure to cut close to the bone. As one critic noted: "Troubled Souls is the superior work of two prodigiously talented creators and excels as a suspense story, as a political statement, and as a depiction of life in a particular place and time." (3)

Ennis continued to court controversy with his second work for Crisis. True Faith took dead aim at the Church when another disaffected loner comes under the wing of a psychotic toilet salesman who is aligned with a subversive organisation. Drawn by Warren Pleece (now working for DC), the less-than-respectful tone of the work led to controversy in the press and the pulping of the collected edition by Fleetway (later restored by Vertigo). A sequel to Troubled Souls, For a Few Troubles More, appeared in Crisis in 1990 and marked Ennis' final, currently unavailable, contribution - while a short

story, *Suburban Hell: A Dog & His Bastard*, appeared in a special edition of *Revolver* with artwork by Philip Swarbrick.

Later that year, Ennis went to work for 2000AD, writing the 6-part series *Chopper* (again with McCrea), before graduating to *Judge Dredd* where he had an extended run including the 6-issue *Emerald Isle*, which saw the eponymous lawman take a tour of a futuristic Ireland populated by a more sociable breed of policeman than he was accustomed to. Ennis' contribution to "The Galaxy's Greatest Comic" would last only a year before he began work on another *Revolver* special and a one-shot for *Comic Relief* and then joined DC/Vertigo full-time as a replacement for Jamie Delano on the ongoing series *Hellblazer* – a move that would prove pivotal in his career.

In *Hellblazer*, the story of paranormal investigator John Constantine (who originally appeared as a recurring character in Alan Moore's horror comic *Swamp Thing*), Delano's school of hard knocks approach set a precedent for bleak, adult story-telling. Ennis took up the challenge of having to maintain the high standards of the series with a number audacious moves: giving his protagonist lung cancer, for example, thereby compounding Constantine's ills by merging his mystical troubles with physical ones - not to mention a few scrapes involving his friends' drug habits, experiences in prostitution and rough treatment by the BNP (the fascistic British National Party).

Ennis' run on *Hellblazer* was also marked by a burgeoning interest in fallen angels and ultraviolence as well as his first collaboration with artist Steve Dillon. The end of the Ennis/Dillon run in 1994 was followed by a brief return to 2000AD before the release of the first issue of *Preacher* in 1995 – a project on which Ennis and Dillon had full creative control and would, in time, be widely acclaimed as their masterwork. (4)

Collecting issues 1-7, the initial trade paperback *Gone to Texas* acts as both the first movement of the narrative but also as a statement of intent; introducing narrative, plot and perspective in short order. Most importantly it sets the tone in terms of genre; an understanding of which is necessary in assessing the wider structure of the work.

Although sometimes derided as more of a straight-jacket than a launch-pad for creativity, the understanding of genre, particularly in the realm of cinema, is an important part of engaging and subverting audience expectations. Schatz, for example, argues that in film genres there is a contract between creator and audience, each type of story bringing with it a set of constructs and the baggage of previous works and, as such, a sense of the familiar (5). Expectation being half the battle, the other half is the delivery of the unexpected to balance the repetitive with the novel, yet such mechanistic approaches to writing are often criticised as valuing repetition over innovation in what is already deemed a restrictive canon. As Buscombe notes: "Many people wish to avoid the whole question of genre because it is held that it will lead to the laying down of rules and regulations which will arbitrarily restrict the freedom of the artist to create what he likes, or the freedom of the critic to talk about anything he wants to." (6)

The current understanding of genre, at the level of the audience at least, has moved on to treating convention as a language, in itself, capable of being subverted and reinvented through the manipulation of basic genre elements, such as iconography, setting and structure. In 1942, and somewhat ahead of their time, Welleck & Warren (7) argued that genre should be conceived in terms of a collection of works based upon a common ‘inner form’ and ‘outer form’. The argument continues that ‘inner form’ goes to the deeper levels of thematics, subject matter and wider emotional, political and/or philosophical resonances. By contrast, the outer structure consists of elements such as setting, wardrobe and other miscellaneous qualities unique to the specific genre type. As a hybrid form of American Western and Gothic tale however, *Preacher* needs to be analysed first in terms of its separate parts in order to make sense of the whole.

A genre unique to American culture, the Western is a celebration of history and the human will to tame the land, as well an affirmation of rigid moral codes in which goodness triumphs. As the character Van der Pol puts it in Book 6, *Salvation*: “The myth of America: That simple, honest men, born of her Great Plains and woods and skies have made a nation of her, and will prove worthy of her when the time is right.”(8)

For *Kitses* the Western reveals and celebrates the dichotomy that exists between the pastoral ideal and the realism of the city, the former with its wide open spaces full of possibilities, the latter with its poverty, vice and corruption. (9) Depicting the urban way of life as restrictive and rife with vices and excessive intellectualism, the untamed West speaks to different qualities in the American mind; a value system of freedom, honour, self-knowledge and a sense of tradition. Yet, this is of course counterbalanced by a brutality and violence, where the law has yet to take a foothold. The more formulaic Western often has no time for moral ambiguity: its plots are traditional linear narratives of revenge, reluctant heroes and high plains romance. (10) The visual structure of the Western is immediately recognisable - inhospitable settings, half-formed towns, chapels, saloons, jails, courthouses, outhouses and cathouses – garrison towns linking coast to coast. The wardrobe is similarly identifiable - ten gallon hats, dusty gingham, spurs and ladies’ necklines which match their moral standing - the lower they go, the looser they get. Tools of the trade begin and end (almost) with the ubiquitous firearm, from Derringers, Colts and Winchester shotguns for the cowboys to knives, axes and bows for the “injuns”. Playing second fiddle to the arsenal are the horses and the simple etiquette of saddled for men, side-saddled for ladies. Add to this the plot tensions of homesteader versus rancher and/or the civilising effect of the railroad, all of which mark the beginning of the end for the Western’s archetypal lone hero. As powerful as any of the above may be, however, the addition of one potent quality seals the deal in identifying a Western: the iconography of its male stars; Henry Fonda, Jimmy Stewart, Roy Rogers and, it goes without saying, John Wayne – good bad men all (11).

In *Preacher* all of the above can be found in full effect. (12) Dillon’s character designs generally sport a simple wardrobe of chinos, blue jeans and open collared shirts, not to mention the wide brimmed hats of every yokel trooper south of the Mason Dixon line – the character of Sheriff Root in Book 1 seems to walk straight out of Dodge and onto the page, via the X-Files. Dillon compounds the familiarity of this environment with a series of no-horse-towns such as *Salvation*, desert-scapes purpose built for

showdowns with a brigade of tanks and helicopters (13) (as in Book 6) and The Alamo itself (in Book 9) – the only real place Custer’s story can end. All of this is hemmed in with splintery panelling virtually creaking at the seams with the weight of detail.

Jesse Custer is a paragon of the Western ideal, a man of principle he is quick to action and has no problem with lethal force, either from the barrel of a gun or the back of his hand.

He values friendship above all else and will go to the ends of the Earth for his ‘pardner’ Cassidy, as shown in Book 3 where the action shifts to France and Jesse rescues Cassidy from the clutches of The Grail. Custer is also, for better or worse, mired in old-fashioned chivalry, much to the chagrin of his beloved Tulip, herself a gun for hire. The final straw in the matter of affiliations with the Western is the constant reappearance of The Duke (quite obviously John Wayne although never actually name checked), as Custer’s spirit guide.

While Preacher’s representation of Custer’s psychosis aligns his character with the Gothic it also helps position him as the quintessential cowboy. As Warshow notes “Where the Westerner lives it is always 1870”. Custer is by design the embodiment of this ideal but, as will be shown later, he is also a hypocritical relic, out of time. (14) This leads back to the idea of the mythic in the Western. Central to the genre is a core of rational, upstanding, Protestant values, balanced out by a belief in the almost supernatural powers of its icons. Kitses summarises the evolving mindset of the Western as: "a] romantic narrative which insisted on the idealisation of characters who wielded near magical powers. Recurrent confrontations between the personified forces of good and evil, testimony to the grip of New England Calvinist ethic, had soon focused the tales in the direction of morality play."(15)

This warping of history into a national myth of ‘great men’ and faith-based expansionism takes the Western into the realms of genre proper, where conventions can be moulded and refit according to the premise and demands of the story, its creator and its audience. Salisbury’s interview with Ennis confirms the important role of genre convention in this regard: “The idea of the Western was important to me because it allows you to have archetypal characters: the hero, the girlfriend, the roguish sidekick, the comic relief, the villain who’s a total, horrible shit.”(16)

While the ‘idea’ of the Western forms one half of the genre play that is Preacher the second strand brings in a strong element of the supernatural; allowing for deeper analysis of the concepts of institutional corruption, faith and redemption in the form of the Gothic. Predating the Western era by some 100 years, Gothic literature has generally been treated as a salacious brand of fiction riddled with inconsistency, superstition, and blasphemy. (17) Working off the mantra of ‘excess, ruin and death’ Gothic fiction has a history of exploring the nature and the cause of evil. Using melodramatic imagery and scenarios to evoke a sense of the sublime – the Gothic often goes against the grain of rationality to do so, aiming for emotional resonance over intellectual debate. The interpretation of Gothic fiction has ranged from a dismissal of the canon as mere sensationalism to a celebration of the genre as subversive and experimental form which challenges the reader’s experience through a combination of uncanniness and

horror. (18) Botting writes of the Gothic's appeal in terms of its aesthetic of illogic, superstition and subversion:

Drawing on myths, legends and folklore of medieval romances, Gothic conjured up magical worlds, and tales of knights, monsters, ghosts...untamed by reason and unrestrained by conventional 18th century demands for simplicity...Gothic fictions seemed to promote vice and violence, giving free reign to selfish ambitions and desires beyond the proscriptions of law or family duty.(19)

Applying the Welleck & Warner model of inner and outer form to the Gothic garner throws up with it a number of preconceptions and narrative conventions solidified over hundreds of years. Sedgwick, in her post-Freudian reading of the genre, lists the constants in Gothic fiction as follows:

[plots are] likely to be discontinuous and involuted, incorporating tales within tales, changes of narration, such framing devices as found manuscripts or interpolated histories. You know that certain characteristic preoccupations will be aired. These will include the priesthood and monastic institutions, sleep-like and death-like states, subterranean spaces and live burial, doubles, the discovery of obscured family ties, affinities between narrative and pictorial art, possibilities of incest, unnatural echoes or silences, unintelligible writings, the unspeakable, the poisonous effects of guilt or shame, nocturnal landscapes or dreams, apparitions from the past, Faustian pacts, wandering Jew-like figures, civil insurrections and fires, the charnel house and the mad house.(20)

Already from the above a veritable checklist of the Preacher formula can be put together; its meandering journey narrative with an array of tributaries; the partnering of the sexual private detectives; the inimitable Jesus de Sade; the serial killer, Serial Si; Custer's profession as a man of God; the Grail; Tulip's downward spiral into self-pity; the disfigured Arseface's odyssey to superstardom and back again, Cassidy doomed existence as an immortal wandering-jew, all fit the model. (21)

A further Gothic component in the narrative is that of the Big House family drama. Book 2, *Until The End Of The World*, explores Custer's childhood but also depicts the first interaction between the Almighty and the protagonists; the first of many interactions fraught with scheming tension and hostility. This slice of distinctively Southern Gothic is accentuated by the addition of a grotesque matriarch, cross burning rednecks, bestiality and deformed children.

Supplementary Gothic elements in the story include the iconography of supernatural beings such as demons and vampires as well as settings of ruins, crumbling mansions and forbidding landscapes - often used as metaphors for darker places of the psyche. (22) Straddling elements of both core genres, the chilling character of *The Saint of Killers* is a perfect hybrid construct, matching the single-minded menace of the high plains drifter with guns that never empty, shots that never go astray and the ghosts of hundreds following in his wake. Similarly, Cassidy who is one part Doc Holliday and one part Shane MacGowan has a foot in both the Western and the Gothic. However, he also acts as the linchpin holding Ennis' world together – a role that shall be examined in due course.

Thematically, the Gothic has long been preoccupied with questions about the nature of evil and its presence in the world, the primacy of the soul, and Man's relationship with God, one only has to think of such canonical texts as Charles Maturin's *Melmoth the Wanderer* (1820), James Hogg's *Memoirs of A Justified Sinner* (1824), and Robert Louis Stevenson's *Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* (1886). As Journet writes "There can be no deep knowledge of evil without a deep knowledge of God." (23) In *Preacher* this "deep knowledge" goes beyond a conversation with the finer points of Christian thought, turning instead into a full-blown critique of the concept of faith. Ennis' motive in this regard stems from his own childhood experiences:

I remember the first time I ran across religion. I have this memory of the teacher sitting us all down and telling us about God, who was a special friend and lived in our heart and knew what we were doing always. He loved us and watched us and if we loved him back...then he would reward us...I was so freaked by the idea of him being in your heart and seeing everything you do...That was my first exposure to the idea of religion and I suppose its never made more sense than that.(24)

Similarly short shrift is given to the costume-drama hysterics of Book 2, when sexual deviant Jesus De Sade is beaten to a pulp for videotaping child abuse during an orgy and, in Book 5, when Cassidy kills the solipsistic vampire leader of a cabal of fetishists.

Contemporary critics have argued that, as the world runs out of mystery, horror has gradually crept inside the psyche and taken a firm foothold in the mind. Botting, for example, traces a progression of terrors from without to terrors from within as societal norms become more liberal. Fantasy, madness, the loss of freedom and the uncanny are recurring features in the modern Gothic and all are made use of in *Preacher*, particularly in Book 2, where the Langelle clan's twisted regime becomes responsible for Jesse's continued visits with The Duke as well as his parents' murder. Another aspect of more contemporary Gothic is also represented here; a body-horror and brutality of the violence in which bodies are made seem like little more than turgid water-balloons ready to pop at a moment's notice. The effect of splatter for sheer shock-value (and occasionally slapstick) can never be understated.

While both the Western and the Gothic are evoked in equal measure in *Preacher*, "on paper" the mix should not work. The Western as a modern, secular (albeit it Protestant-fuelled) genre, comes with it a realism based on the concrete, agrarian reality of American history...the more realistic the better. In the other corner broods the Gothic; a romantic genre concerned with flights of fancy, emotional effect and the supernatural with a conflicted religious identity- here heavy leaning toward Catholic iconography including angels, demons and gods - valuing effect over rationality... the scarier the better. Appearing inherently incompatible the argument for genre plasticity would seem to be imperilled but for a vital third element which binds these genres together with a decidedly green streak of arcane Gaelic mythology and history. It is here that the "Irishness" of *Preacher* comes to the fore, legitimising the link of the Gothic and the Western through a mythic structure which predates both genres and is introduced by a combination of back-story and plot through the character of Cassidy.

Predating the printed word and characterised by a level field of interaction between man and the gods, the introduction of the Irish element in the narrative creates a space where Custer can spit in the face of the Almighty not as a contrivance but as a legitimate course of action. As O’Cathaisigh argues: “Irish myth is primarily concerned with the relationship between man and the Gods and that the myth of the hero is used as a vehicle for exploring this relationship.”(25)

The genius of Ennis & Dillon here lies in the creation of Custer, the rational hero, and the placing of him in direct contact with God, in a relationship not defined by shock and awe but by contempt and loathing. For this relationship to work however there has to be a link from Custer’s rational, Western viewpoint to the supernatural world of the Almighty; because, as a preacher in the rational world, this relationship with God cannot exist. This is where the character of Cassidy comes into play. In terms of construction, Cassidy represents the addition of a Catholic culture of faith and mischief with its assorted cast of angels, an interventionist God and the presence of miracles. A flawed sidekick, in the tradition of Doc Holliday, Cassidy is a creature of compulsion damned by his need for blood but also for more worldly drugs such as alcohol and heroin. Here he is beholden to the world of the primeval but also to the world of men. He is unmistakably Irish but is deeply in love with his adopted home. His friendship with Custer is unshakable but his love for Tulip (and those before her) is toxic. This duality of character goes straight to the heart of the Western/Gothic, secular/supernatural relationship in *Preacher* but also echoes Ennis’ own perspective on the America he is writing about. Where authenticity may falter in the Texan idiom he emulates, Ennis can only succeed in balancing the scales through Cassidy. As a narrative construction Cassidy provides continuity between the world of men and God. (26) Proof of his pivotal function is easily identifiable in *Salvation* where Custer’s story takes on a distinctly realistic tone when he separates from Tulip and Cassidy. Ennis’ challenge here is to make Cassidy an organic part of the story as opposed to a contrivance designed to knit narrative disparities together. This problem is resolved by providing him with a detailed backstory covering not just Cassidy’s own life in America but also the wider social and political climate of the times, turning the vampire into an everyman for the Ellis Island generation.

Much of the groundwork for Cassidy’s backstory is provided in the latter stages of Book 3, *Proud Americans*, which covers his involvement in the 1916 rising and his rebirth as a creature of the night. Cassidy’s brother, Patrick, who has led Cassidy out through a side-door of the GPO in the midst of the fighting, rails against the political naiveté of the rebellion. Shocked at the solipsistic ramblings of Pádraig Pearse and his lust for a ‘blood sacrifice’, Patrick eschews the notion that “a terrible beauty is born”, and leads his brother to escape through the streets of Dublin, swimming the River Liffey to the South Side and to safety. In conversation on the way to a safe-house, somewhere west of the city, it emerges Cassidy’s parents were of a mixed marriage and that Patrick had only gone to fight to protect his brother from certain death at the hands of the British. Such a pragmatic streak may have been enough to keep them out of harms way from the political forces of the time however it is an unfortunate encounter with a decidedly otherworldly creature that claims young Cassidy’s (human) life and brings about his rebirth as a vampire.

What sets Cassidy’s demonic siring apart from the other vampires who pop up from time to time in the series is that his experience is not based on a decadence and consent but rather is the result of a feral compulsion entirely bereft of romance. Cassidy is attacked by a silent creature of spindly, haggard

appearance vanishes into the night at the first sign of resistance. This kind of subhuman undead demon operates in direct contrast to the posturing deviants of Book 5; Cassidy's is an experience more like that depicted in *An American Werewolf in London* (1981) than in *Interview with the Vampire* (1994). Conventional narratives of vampire attacks may have gone on to include a romantic courtship; a lengthy apprenticeship; a coming to terms with new-found abilities and appetites, but keeping the plot lean and mean here Ennis leaves Cassidy to fend for himself before a chance meeting necessitates an escape from the Old Country to America and the start of the next movement in Cassidy's biography; the migration narrative.

Continuing Cassidy's journey by transferring him to America brings with it a whole other set of cultural baggage, effectively changing his story from the tale of a hopeless outsider to a free agent with the world at his feet. The significance of exile and the reversal of status as a means to broaden character is not lost on Ennis either, who further uses the change of scenery to eschew the conventions of vampire fiction for a more sober account of the (still) New World. The effect of a different shore on the complexion can be rebirth in itself: "By virtue of its conceptual status, exile becomes and aesthetic agent, an imaginative resource capable of both influencing and rereading a text's intellectual presuppositions and formal attainments." (27)

Cassidy's New York is also an archetypal account of Irish experience marked with the pitfalls of the time. Dillon's cityscapes by lamplight offer a sepia tinted look of a towering city, as imposing as it is impressive, filled with dangers and unexpected friendships within a block of each other. As Coogan writes: "The emigrant faced a variety of dangers: improper lodging houses, illusive advertisements, crooked contractors, dishonest prospectors and remitted sharpers." (28)

The Irish emigrant in these circumstances often did not have the benefit of financial backing or educational qualifications, instead relying on a work ethic to get by. Furthermore, the majority of Irish emigrants were single, generally youthful and unskilled. Indeed for the duration of Cassidy's stay in New York his status as a creature out-of-step with the march of time only becomes an issue as his immortality becomes more apparent in contrast to his drinking buddies' ageing. The lack of curiosity on their part is also indicative of the mood of the time, when the migrant population could be described as: "a variegated and discordant clan of emigrants, expatriates and escapees of one kind or another."(29)

Cassidy (his immortality a constant double-edged sword), finds himself even out of this loop. Leaving New York, he brings his charms to Texas and into the company of one gun-toting Tulip O'Hare and her ex-boyfriend, the Rev. Jesse Custer. Thus the central cast is assembled.

The synthesis of the Western and the Gothic accordingly completed, there remains an element not yet accounted for in the linear coming together of form and their construction as a narrative; that element is character. Every character in Ennis' work has a value system, those who appear good have an innate darkness to them and even the blackest of demons is capable of acting to a moral code – only the simpering Almighty refuses to demonstrate any depth beyond a craven need for affection and validation. The roots of such irreverent (pun intended) writing can be traced back to the Irish tradition where the

rebel is romanticised despite a prevailing moral conservatism. Actor Aidan Quinn has summed up this quality as follows:

Many people in Ireland with this incredibly strong conservative strain to them – they never do this and they never do that and never say a bad word and then there’s this wildness, the love of life, this love of song and dance and laughter...And both sides of the character are revered and held up as something you’re supposed to be. It’s slightly schizophrenic.(30)

This double standard rings true with each character in *Preacher*. Custer is capable of great violence and tenderness within the confines of his moral code but he is also an outlaw with an evil eye Balor would have been proud of. Cassidy rides a knife edge from the savage to the sarcastic on a whim, and even The Saint of Killers has a background steeped in pathos and is not averse to making a deal when it suits his needs.

Cassidy’s dualistic nature is perhaps the most apparent in terms of audience sympathy, as he goes from hellraiser to innocent abroad, before becoming a junkie and a leech capable of the grossest acts of violence against women; he will even sacrifice his own self-respect to feed his habit, when heroin addiction sends him through a string of lovers, each one left emotionally and physically battered by his habit. Believing Custer to be dead, Tulip becomes increasingly dependant on Cassidy. However, with it is the revelation of Cassidy’s true nature which spurs Custer on to avenge tenfold the harm done to Tulip through months of soul-destroying substance abuse.

The inevitable conclusion for the series lies in the strongest culmination of the Western, the Gothic and Irish myth: a showdown at The Alamo. The finale also ties together the three strands of the story: Tulip and The Grail, Cassidy and Custer, The Saint of Killers and God. (31) For all who deserve it, redemption is at hand as Cassidy makes a Faustian pact with The Almighty to save Custer’s life in exchange for the release of Genesis. This act of selflessness rescues Cassidy from his compulsions and offers him a chance of personal salvation. Artistically, these final confrontations are depicted in a series of splash pages (32) including handwritten letters, a harsh landscape finally at peace with itself, and lastly the quintessential ride into the sunset under a desert sky.

In the final analysis, *Preacher*’s Irish accent turns up a series of Ellis’ own preoccupations with his experience of religion as a child, yet these are filtered through a national obsession with the American Western and a rich history of cultural exchange and integration through the experiences of the Irish diaspora. As a dramatic device the character of Cassidy acts as a cipher, linking together both nations and also their respective literary traditions. It is also the figure of Cassidy which enables Ennis’ to access and fully realise his status as an outsider writing within an American idiom. Linking genres through a shared cultural history; linking the real and the unreal through vampirism and drug addiction; linking the spiritual and the blasphemous through personal experience, *Preacher*’s narrative may very aptly be described as a story “out of Ireland, dragged through Texas with a bloody hard-on, wrapped in barbed wire and rose thorns.”(33) Through no small measure of invention Ennis and Dillon have constructed a mythical world

of outlaws, demons and deities that would feel every bit at home in the Irish midlands as on the open range. Almost.

1. Founded in 1993, Vertigo is an imprint of DC comics established to publish material of a less mainstream and more adult-orientated bent. To date Vertigo titles have been characterised by realistic depictions of violence, sex and other “mature” content and generally do not cover superheroes or any material associated with the mainstream “DC Universe” of Batman, Superman etc. Its first title, *Saga of The Swamp Thing* was published in 1993 followed by *Hellblazer* and *Sandman*. Unlike its parent company, who relies on monthly sales, Vertigo secured its market share in collected works or “trade paperbacks” (often mistaken for graphic novels proper). Vertigo has recently expanded its remit into film with involvement in *Constantine* (2005), *V for Vendetta* (2005) and *A History of Violence* (2005), originally published by Paradox Press. Current popular books include Brian K. Vaughan and Pia Guerra’s *Y: The Last Man* and Brian Wood and Riccardo Burchielli’s *DMZ*.
2. Lansdale, Joe R. in Ennis, G. & Dillon, S. *Preacher: Gone to Texas*. (New York: DC/Vertigo, 1996) p.1
3. Osborne, S.L. 27 September 1998. “Drinking With the Boys: An Evening with Garth Ennis and Steve Dillon” 3 January 2007 <www.sequentialart.com>
4. A complete Garth Ennis bibliography can be found at Michael Karpas, *Garth Ennis Bibliography*. 3 January 2007. <www.enjolrasworld.com/HTML%20Bibliographies/Garth%20Ennis%20Bibliography.htm>
5. Schatz, Thomas. *Hollywood Genres: Formulas, Filmmaking, and The Studio System*. (New York: Random House, 1981)
6. Buscombe, E. “The idea of Genre in American Cinema” *Screen* 11(2) March/April 1970 p.6
7. Welleck, R. & Warren, A. *Theory of Literature*. (1942, 3rd. ed., New York: Harcourt, 1956)
8. Ennis, G. & Dillon, S. *Preacher: Salvation*. (New York: DC/Vertigo, 1999) p.95
9. Kitses, Jim. *Horizons West: Directing the Western from John Ford to Clint Eastwood* (London: BFI, 1969)
10. As described in Johnson, G. *The Western in Images* 6 <www.imagesjournal.com/issue06/infocus/western> 16/2/2007 p.1
11. *Ibid* p.5, p.2

12. This is not to say the Western begins and ends with these same elements. The so-called ‘Spaghetti Westerns’ of Sergio Leone introduced a mud-caked realism while Sam Peckinpah’s *The Wild Bunch* (1969) depicted a landscape of casual violence and misogyny completely at odds with “tradition”. Clint Eastwoods’ *Unforgiven* (1992) and Jonathan Hillcoat’s *The Proposition* (2005) added moral complexities worthy of any contemporary drama but these do not figure in Ennis & Dillon’s world.
13. Specifically Monument Valley where *Stagecoach* (1939) and *The Searchers* (1956) were filmed.
14. Warshow, Robert, *The Immediate Experience Movies, Comics, Theatre, and Other Aspects of Popular Culture*. (New York: Athenium Books, 1970)
15. Kitses, 1969 p.5
16. Salisbury, M., *Writers on Comics Scriptwriting* (London: Titan, 1999) p.90
17. Horace Walpole’s *Castle of Otranto* was published in 1764 laying down a historical marker for the establishment of Gothic fiction. By contrast Westerns in print and film are primarily interested in the period 1850-1900.
18. Sedgwick, Eve. Kosofsky, *The Coherence of Gothic Conventions*. (New York: Arno, 1980)
19. Botting, Fred. *Gothic (The New Critical Idiom)*. (Oxford: Routledge, 1995) pp3-4
20. Sedgwick, p.8
21. Freddy and Bob (Sexual Investigators) appear in books 2 and 8 while decadent pervert Jesus de Sade appears Book 2. Serial Si is a serial killer appearing in Book 1. Arseface is a deformed failed suicide who devotes himself to exacting revenge on Custer for the death of his father.
22. McAndrew, Elizabeth. *The Gothic Tradition in Fiction*. (New York: Columbia, 1924)
23. Journet, Charles Cardinal C. *The Meaning of Evil*. (New York: P. J. Kennedy and Sons, 1963) p.26
24. Salisbury, p.77
25. Ó Cathasaigh, Tomás, ‘The Concept of the Hero in Irish Mythology’, in *The Irish Mind: Exploring Intellectual Traditions*, ed. Richard Kearney (Wolfhound; Dublin, 1985), p. 79
26. The same could be said of *The Saint of Killers* but for the fact that his origins remain undisclosed until later in the narrative and his character as gun for hire only later transforms in a sympathetic loner with a mission. The representation of Cassidy’s character, in contrast, is a constant.

27. O'Brien, George, "The Aesthetics of Exile" in *Contemporary Irish Fiction: Themes, Tropes, Theories*, ed. Liam Harte and Michael Parker. (New York: St. Martin's Press, Dublin: Macmillan, 2000) p.36
28. Coogan, T.P., *Wherever Green is Worn: the story of the Irish Diaspora* (Surrey: Arrow, 2000) p.284
29. O'Brien, p.35
30. Coogan, p.350
31. An overview of the historical significance of The Alamo in Texan history can be found at http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Battle_of_the_Alamo 18/1/2007
32. A page(s) containing a single large image.
33. Lansdale, 1996 p.4

Books in the Preacher Series:

- Ennis, G. & Dillon, S. *Preacher: Gone to Texas*. New York: DC/Vertigo, 1996
- Ennis, G. & Dillon, S. *Preacher: Proud Americans*. New York: DC/Vertigo, 1997
- Ennis, G. & Dillon, S. *Preacher: Until the End of The World*. New York: DC/Vertigo, 1997
- Ennis, G. & Dillon, S. *Preacher: Ancient History*. New York: DC/Vertigo, 1998
- Ennis, G. & Dillon, S. *Preacher: Dixie Fried*. New York: DC/Vertigo, 1998
- Ennis, G. Dillon, S. & Snebjerg, P. *Preacher: War In The Sun*. New York: DC/Vertigo 1999
- Ennis, G. & Dillon, S. *Preacher: Salvation*. New York: DC/Vertigo, 1999
- Ennis, G. & Dillon, S. *Preacher: All Hells A-Coming*. New York: DC/Vertigo, 2000
- Ennis, G. & Dillon, S. (2001) *Preacher: Alamo*. New York: DC/Vertigo, 2001

Appendix

A product of the union between an angel and a Demon “Genesis” escapes heaven, prompting God to leave his throne in the care of the archangel, Seraphi caste. Quickly the lesser Adepti caste, originally charged with containing Genesis, dispatches The Saint of Killers to retrieve it and kill whatever human host it finds. Merging with the soul of Jesse Custer, a disillusioned minister working in the town of Annville, Genesis destroys both church and congregation, leaving only rubble behind. By chance Custer is found unconscious in the ruins by his ex-girlfriend and gun for hire Tulip O’Hare and an Irish vampire named Cassidy. Custer learns that Genesis has given him a power equal to that of God in the “The Word” allowing him manipulate people’s actions around him. In a standoff with The Saint of Killers and an Adepti, the truth about God’s escape from Heaven is revealed and Custer resolves to find the Lord and hold him accountable for the state of the world.

Jesse and Tulip are kidnapped by his redneck uncles, TC and Jody, and brought to the family home, Angelville. Reliving the trauma of an unhappy childhood at the hands of his uncles and the malevolent matriarch Ms Marie L’Angelle, Custer deals with memories of the deaths of his parents, friends and pet dog, as well as his hallucinations of John Wayne. In L’Angelville God appears to Ms Marie and entrusts her with the mission to dissuade Custer from his quest. Jody shoots Tulip in the head, killing her instantly only to be resurrected by the Lord as a sign of his love. Custer and Tulip destroy Angelville and continue more resolute than ever to hold God to account.

Rumours of Custer’s power spreads to Starr, a member of the secret society, The Grail, entrusted with the bloodline of Jesus. With the current ancestor of Christ exposed as a 16 year old, retarded after generations of inbreeding, Starr sets his sights on Custer as a true messiah, a plan which quickly turns into a personal vendetta leading to the destruction of the grail.

Custer travels across America to New Orleans where a voodoo ritual tells him the exact nature of Genesis and the history of The Saint of Killers as a mortal man rendered sociopath by the death of his family – later attributed to direct intervention from God.

Starr tries to capture Custer during a showdown in Monument Valley at which The Saint of Killers decimates what is left of the Grail’s private army. A nuclear device is set off in an attempt to kill The Saint, failing but Custer cannot escape the blast and is feared dead. Cassidy lures Tulip into a world of drug addiction while Custer, minus an eye, makes his own way from coast to coast.

Reunited with Tulip, Custer makes Cassidy his enemy and a deal with The Saint of Killers. A showdown at the Alamo sees Starr, Custer and Cassidy all dead and the release of Genesis while The Saint of Killers takes the throne in Heaven, shooting the Lord in the process. Having already made a deal with God however Custer is brought back to life and Cassidy himself returns to Earth as a mortal.