In his "Great Directors" entry on Samuel Fuller, Adrian Martin lists *Forty Guns* among a proposed pantheon of films that would define an unjustly maligned figure, often described as a "barbarian" or "primitive", as a bona-fide great director. Noting Fuller's unique employment of the noir and melodrama styles of the 1950s, Martin argues that we move our attention beyond style and analyse the films themselves which are "all about drives, impulses, emotional states that are imprinted on the social being, as traces of ideological socialisation, as much as they issue from within the hearts, minds and guts of individuals" (1). Any serious analysis of *Forty Guns* should consider issues of both style and substance as well as the role of a director who not only transcended the generic formulas of his era but influenced other directors in different national cinemas by directing a film scandalously denigrated as an over-excessive B-movie at the time of its release, but one whose dynamic qualities and influence still remain scandalously unacknowledged to date.

*Forty Guns* provides a great illustration of the auteur theory at its most concrete. Written, directed and produced by Samuel Fuller, it is also a key example of how a creative mind not only subverted the so-called "genius of the system" promoted by corporate-minded critics today but also one which radically reworks generic premises. Photographed by the great Joseph Biroc (also noted for his collaboration with another "excessive" talent – Robert Aldrich), *Forty Guns* is not only a classic example of 50s widescreen cinematography but also that radical noir sensibility employed in *Attack!* (Robert Aldrich, 1955), *China Gate* (Samuel Fuller, 1957), *The Garment Jungle* (Vincent Sherman, 1957), *Hush...* *Hush, Sweet Charlotte* (Robert Aldrich, 1964), *The Killing of Sister George* (Robert Aldrich, 1968) and *Hustle* (Robert Aldrich, 1975) that analyses the destructive nature of socially dangerous drives imprinted on vulnerable human beings whether they are conscious of them or not. Fuller certainly transcends genre but he also responsibly uses style to radically undermine the normative presuppositions of both his characters and audiences.

The influences behind *Forty Guns* are not difficult to detect. Set in Tombstone, Arizona, during 1881, the film is Fuller's version of *The Gunfight at the O.K. Corral* (John Sturges, 1957) with the Bonell brothers substituting for the Earps and Jessica (Barbara Stanwyck) and Brockie Drummond (John Ericson) representing the Clantons. After the death of the assassin Charlie Savage (Chuck Hayward), Brockie displays a "murdered sign" on his corpse inside an undertaker's window based upon the real-life aftermath of the original O.K. Corral incident also employed by John Sturges in *Hour of the Gun* (1967). The presence of Ford regulars Hank Worden and Chuck Roberson (who doubled for John Wayne for 30 years) certainly evokes the director who loved to be known as the man who made westerns. However, far from displaying these references in the smug and self-satisfied manner of a Quentin Tarantino, Fuller quotes these sources to destabilise former traditions in the same manner that he attempted with his war films and novels. A crucial factor in this process is the presence of Barbara Stanwyck. Working at a time when most Hollywood actresses were supposed to accept graceful retirement or relegation to demeaning roles in horror films, Stanwyck's presence in this film not only presents viewers with a pre-feminist icon of a mature woman using her body not only to manipulate the body politic and her "forty pricks" (as Fuller humorously described her employees) but by single-handedly building up her cattle empire by herself, unlike the characters she played in Anthony Mann's *The Furies* (1950), Allan Dwan's *Cattle Queen of Montana* (1954) and Joseph Kane's *The Maverick Queen* (1956). Her Vance Jeffords of *The Furies* is the obvious blueprint for Jessica Drummond but Fuller has reworked the excessive female oedipal emotions of this character into one for whom love represents an uncontrollable battleground. As she says to Griff Bonell (Barry Sullivan), love resembles a war in being "easy to start (but) hard to stop".
Like many other Fuller films, *Forty Guns* influenced the director's younger European counterparts. Godard borrowed the rifle-frames of Eve Brent in *A bout de souffle* (1960) along with Fuller's raw emotional cinematic style. Sergio Leone borrowed the extreme close-ups of the eyes and the Bonell brothers walking style for his Italian Westerns (2). Fuller also employed several long takes using dynamic camera movement in an accomplished manner, thus anticipating Godard's later use of montage as *mise en scène* especially in his use of deep focus composition, and significant use of editing techniques involving the relationship of a multiplicity "of planes in a meaningful format" (3). Fuller often employs long takes that involve the camera moving right to left as a varied number of different actions occur in the background. After Griff and Wes see Chico off on the stagecoach, so he will not become a "freak" by following his brother's "gladiator" path by becoming a gunfighter, the camera follows Wes to the gunshop in the background where he obtains a rifle to back up Griff moving in the foreground of the image who is being unknowingly set-up for assassination. The sequence ends as Griff approaches the deadly alley where Charley Savage waits in an upstairs room. Following a number of edited shots, the sequence ends with Chico now beyond redemption after shooting Griff's assassin in the back. It is a masterly use of screen composition containing significant relationships of meaningful elements within the scene. Chico can no longer return to the family ranch as an innocent youngster. Also, another deadly scenario of violence is set in motion which will encompass all the film's main characters.

The five minute sequence involving Jessica, Griff and Ned Logan (Dean Jagger), which leads to Logan's suicide announced by the sound of his feet against the wall immediately following Griff's kiss of Jessica, is one of the most brilliant sequences in American cinema. It also employs subtle camera movement as well as an avant-garde employment of Griff's disappearance from one part of the frame before he surprisingly appears in another part without Fuller giving the audience any hint of this destabilising movement (4). The ballads "High Riding Woman" and "God Has His Arms Around Me", both sung by "Jidge" Carroll not only recall Fuller's use of the ballad of the "dirty little coward who shot Mr. Howard" in *I Shot Jesse James* (1949) but also anticipate the use of the musical theme as "leitmotif" in the Italian Western. Like Godard, Fuller employs his own version of those long take and mobile camera movements earlier used by Welles and Ophuls and also uses a judicious editing technique to add resonance to a particular scene. The sequence begins with a low-angle shot of the recently widowed Louvenia (Eve Brent) standing by the funeral hearse before the camera tracks left to reveal the previously off-screen singer of the ballad in medium shot. It then cuts to a close medium shot of Barney ("Jidge" Carroll) as he continues his song, ironically delivering the message that love leads to death. The image returns to the previous medium shot of Barney before tracking right at a different angle to stop at the figure of the bereaved widow. This is one of many instances where Fuller utilises a genre in terms of his stated philosophy in *Pierrot le fou* (1965): "The film is like a battleground; love, hate, action, violence, death. In one word EMOTION."

*Forty Guns* is a 50s Western but one by a director fully attuned to those wartime emotions repressed within an era of men in grey flannel suits which would soon erupt in the next decade. As Fuller recalled, this was one of his many juvenile delinquency films, a subject influenced by *Rebel without a Cause* (Nicholas Ray, 1955), seen in *Run of the Arrow* (1957), *Verboten!* (1958), and *Underworld U.S.A.* (1960) (5). This even occurs in his role as Van Meer in Larry Cohen's *A Return to Salem's Lot* (1987) when he disciplines Michael Moriarty's son. But, in *Forty Guns*, Fuller relates Brockie's violence to an endemic part of American culture which runs throughout the entire film and the resolution of which may be emotionally tragic (as in the "first" version of the film where Griff kills Jessica to eliminate Brockie's threat to the community) (6). Despite its generic framework, *Forty Guns* represents the world of America of the past, present and (ominously) future. Griff takes on the sheriff's badge not by overpowering a drunken Indian but the spoiled brother of a woman using the legal and political machinery to her own advantage. Uncontrollable sexuality and violence dominate the film both on narrative and visual levels. Wes Bonell (Gene Barry) courts tomboy Louvenia, who works alongside her father in a gunshop, by gazing at her through the barrel of a rifle as an object of desire before the next scene abruptly cuts to their kiss. At night, the couple are framed by the criss-cross shadows of rifles which denote the film's links between sexuality and violence as well as the tragic conclusion of their romance when a photographer's request for another kiss for the bride leads to the bridegroom's death. The camera certainly initiates an episode that combines sexuality, violence and death.

Unlike most Hollywood narratives, a weak male commits suicide like the tragic heroine of a melodrama. The younger brother will not be saved from following the path of his elders. After saving Griff's life by killing a man, Chico Bonell (Robert Dix) crosses the path of no return leading him to mature rapidly into the persona his older brother wished to reject until he finally "kills" the woman he loves. *Forty Guns* is an exemplary film in many ways. It reveals a filmmaker ahead of his time who pioneered techniques which were appropriated by acclaimed art movie directors while Fuller himself is still regarded as a B-movie director. Fuller's comments on violence and politics in American society are stated subtly within the image, never didactically bombarding the audience into insensibility but leaving them to consider the implications for movie directors while Fuller himself is still regarded as a B-movie director. The Internet Movie Database entry on Sergio Leone mistakenly credits him with instigating three out of five trademarks that Fuller actually initiated in the Western. These are the deployment of the extreme close-up; the depiction of ugly and violent acts with unglamorous simplicity; and long periods of silence followed by quick bursts of action.


For the possible influence of Fuller's use of long takes on later European directors such as Miklos Jansco and Andrei Tarkovsky, see Jean-Pierre Coursodon, "Desire Roped In: Notes on the Fetishism of the Long Take in *Rope*", *Rouge*, 4, 2004.


6. Fuller, 357. Fuller had to reshoot the ending to appease the marketing people but, like most creative Hollywood directors, made the second version entirely unconvincing. One perceptive critic titled a key still from this film as "the death of Jessica". See Nicholas Garnham, *Samuel

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