Making Sense of *Deadwood*: Seth Bullock and the Indian

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The action of the first season of *Deadwood*[1] begins in July 1876, the month following the Battle of the Little Bighorn (June 25th). George Armstrong Custer, his final battle, and the political questions raised by the circumstances of the Sioux (who had defeated him) are referred to throughout all three seasons of *Deadwood*, but the first season is saturated with the fresh and living memory of Custer's last stand. The Deadwood camp (as its inhabitants call it) has grown up in the heart of the Black Hills of the Dakota Territory, at that time the most contested area of land in the United States. The Black Hills were sacred to the Sioux, to whom they had been deeded by the Treaty of Fort Laramie in 1868 (sometimes referred to as the Sioux Treaty). Following the discovery of gold in the Black Hills in the early 1870s, the Treaty was violated by the United States, behind a smokescreen of translation and rewriting.[2] The Sioux, many of whose tribes had never been happy with the Treaty, responded reciprocally to such cynicism by refusing to remain on the reservation land assigned to them by the Treaty. This is why Custer and the Seventh Cavalry were in Montana in the summer of 1876; they were riding shotgun to a shameful government policy.

Most of the action of *Deadwood* takes place indoors, in several locations within the camp, or in its busy, crowded thoroughfare. The sources of light usually come from outside the buildings in which the action happens, and the thoroughfare is an habitually threatening place. The combined effect of backlighting, interiority, and overcrowded social space

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[1] *Deadwood: The Complete First Season* (Home Box Office, Inc., 2004).
[2] David Milch, *Deadwood: Stories of the Black Hills* (New York: HBO/Bloomsbury, 2004), 148. Milch is the creator of *Deadwood*.

is that 'the cinematography is often claustrophobic.'[3] At the beginning of Episode 6, 'Plague,'[4] the viewer is apparently released from this *mise en scène*, as the first of four establishing shots frames a view of the Black Hills. For only the second time in the series we are outside the confines of the camp, but also without the contextual landmarks to which we have become accustomed. This liberation into the unfamiliar may be unsettling, an effect emphasized by the fact that there is no music to set the scene or establish the mood.

In the course of the two preceding episodes Wild Bill Hickock has been shot at the card table, and his killer, Jack McCall, has been tried and found 'innocent.' The judge instructed the jury to acquit the acknowledged killer in accordance with the law of custom. There is no law in Deadwood: in the words of Albert Swearengen, proprietor of the Gem Saloon, 'we're illegal.' Because Deadwood is not a legally-constituted community, for the court (which is any case a somewhat makeshift arrangement) to return a 'guilty' verdict would be to assume the power and authority of a sovereign community; and such an assumption could prejudice any future relationship that Deadwood's inhabitants might wish to negotiate with the United States, especially regarding annexation by the Territories of Dakota or Montana. No-one sees this more clearly than Swearengen himself, the presiding genius of the camp. He leans on the judge, and does so out of strongly-held community spirit. As he confides to his fellow publican Cy Tolliver: 'For outright stupidity the whole fucking trial concept goes shoulder to shoulder with that cocksucker Custer's thinking when he headed for that ridge.'[5] The main potential consequence of the trial, for Swearengen, is that the Deadwood community is isolating itself in its own vulnerability.

Following the acquittal of Jack McCall, Seth Bullock, friend of Wild Bill, one-time sheriff in Montana, and a future sheriff of Deadwood, rides out of the camp in pursuit of his friend's killer, and into the landscape we see in the opening shot of 'Plague.' The four establishing shots are evidently of the natural environment, but the fourth includes an Indian

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[3] David Drysdale, '"Laws and Every Other Damn Thing": Authority, Bad Faith, and the Unlikely Success of Deadwood,' in David Lavery, ed., *Reading Deadwood: A Western to Swear By* (London and New York: I.B.Tauris, 2006), p. 140.
[4] Directed by Davis Guggenheim, written by Malcolm MacRury, who had also collaborated on Episode 2, 'Deep Water.'
[5] Episode 5, 'The Trial of Jack McCall,' directed by Ed Bianchi and written by John Belluso.

funeral bier, which the viewer is unlikely to identify yet. There follow four shots of Bullock riding through the woodland, the third of which is almost certainly a point-of-view shot from the perspective of the Indian who is about to attack him, although the viewer is unlikely to intuit that either. The attack of the red man on the white man, announced by the arrow that goes into his horse, surprises the viewer as much as it surprises Seth Bullock.

From the moment of the attack, the viewer is thrust back into the familiar Deadwood world of claustrophobic struggle. The ensuing fight is shot in a *mélange* of medium and close-up, and its turning-point is the close-up of Bullock's hand reaching for a rock. From this point, the sequence is composed of ten distinct shots, in which the rock hits the Indian's head sixteeen times. The quickly-varying perspectives of these shots constitute an aggressive visual syntax that keeps the violence in the viewer's face: visually, there is nowhere to go. While the red man intrudes as an alien and aggressive presence, the visual emphasis of the sequence gradually shifts to the violent response of the white man. The final close-ups take us from the bloodied face of the dead red man to the blood-stained face of the living white man, whose expression is anything but triumphant.

The violence is neither stressed nor softened by music, but such sounds as there are amplify the intensity of the visual imagery. The initial stillness of the establishing shots is both visual and aural, and is broken by the sound of the rider, the rush of the arrow, the whinnying of the stricken horse, the thump of horse and rider crashing to the ground, the blow against Bullock's head, the chanting and spitting of the Indian, the gasps of the struggle, and then the appalling and repeated thud of rock against bone. Bullock wins the fight against the odds, and probably to the viewer's relief, because he has been established as a significant figure of moral probity in Deadwood. But what he does here is alienating, and, if his final expression is anything to go by, even self-alienating.

Bullock collapses into unconsciousness, from which he is rescued and revived by his (and Hickock's) friend Charlie Utter, who is returning to Deadwood from a business trip. Utter's subsequent explanation of the Indian attack is for the viewer as well as for Bullock. Towards the end of the fourth episode of this season, 'Here Was a Man,'[6] a Mexican has ridden into Deadwood bearing the severed head of an Indian – the very Indian, it now appears, whose (decapitated) corpse rests on the funeral bier that we saw in the final establishing shot, and which was being watched over by the

[6] Directed by Alan Taylor, written by Elizabeth Sarnoff.

Indian who attacked Bullock, presumably a friend or fellow-tribesman of the dead man. Utter now explains the markings on the Indian's pony, which has not been visible until now, and also why the arrow was aimed for the horse rather than Bullock himself: to be honorable, revenge had to be hands-on. Bullock, himself a man of honor, responds by saying that they should dig a grave, to which Utter replies: 'His way to heaven is above ground and looking west.' Before riding back to Deadwood, they get the body of Bullock's assailant onto the funeral platform.

The late afternoon luminescence now reveals that this episode of *Deadwood* has lasted only a single span of daylight, that it is more concentrated even than Aristotle's prescription that a dramatic action should unfold 'within one circuit of the sun.'[7] Such compressed unity of time heightens the focused quality of 'Plague,' riven as it is with many kinds of sickness.[8] There is the outbreak of smallpox, the control and management of which has suddenly become the camp's most pressing issue; there is Alma Garrett's conflicted condition, her actual withdrawal from opium addiction and her simulated opium high; there are the loaded dice and the crooked crap game at the Bella Union; and there is the pervasive threat of violence against women, represented here in the growing and disturbing tension between Joanie Stubbs and Cy Tolliver. Yet nothing is more rotten in the state of Deadwood than the racial disharmony of red and white. As will be shown, this incident of Bullock and the Indian leads back to the Metz massacre, which has been wrongly but (by some) knowingly attributed to 'those godless heathen cocksuckers.'

That is why this encounter between Bullock and his Indian assailant is such an appropriate structural basis for this episode. The attack, Bullock's response, and the Indian's death constitute the episode's opening sequence; after this the viewer's attention is divided between events within Deadwood itself and the site of the attack on Bullock, which is revisited twice. Twenty-five minutes into the episode, Utter happens across the unconscious Bullock and the dead Indian. And then, after a further twenty minutes, and in the episode's penultimate sequence, we see Utter and Bullock getting the Indian's body onto the funeral platform. The starkly visible head wound reminds us of what happened earlier. As Utter moves from the bier, and evidently acting on an afterthought, he turns to re-

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[7] Aristotle, *Aristotle's Poetics,* trans. Leon Golden, commentary by O.B. Hardison, Jr. (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1968), p.10.

[8] See Erin Hill, ' "What's Afflictin' You?" Corporeality, Body Crises and the Body Politic in *Deadwood*,' in Lavery, ed., *Reading Deadwood*, pp. 171-183.

position the dead man's left leg, which has fallen to the side, after which he and Bullock exchange a glance of mutual acknowledgment. So are they all, all honorable men. The concluding frames of the sequence, as men and horses disappear to the left, recall (and the final frame may even repeat) the last of the four establishing shots with which 'Plague' opened. Bullock's encounter with the Indian has led to Bullock's encounter with Utter, and this, as we shall see in the next episode, propels Bullock into a challenging encounter with himself.

For what has happened here haunts Bullock. In the next episode of the series, 'Bullock Returns to the Camp,'[9] Bullock, clearly in some emotional distress, confides in his business partner, Sol Star. The two men are in their hardware store, and Bullock's words, unprompted by anything in his previous conversation with Sol, come right from his conscience: 'That Indian fought like hell … [He] had to kill me for coming on the burial place, and maybe it'd been me that had killed his friend, cut his friend's head off, so his friend wouldn't have eyes to see the sunset all the years he'd be lying there dead. So he had to kill me for that too. And he couldn't before he laid hands on me, or the killing wouldn't be honorable. We fought like fucking hell, I tell you that much. And I never once had the upper hand. It just happened out the way it happened out. He was just trying to live, same as me, do honor to his friend, make some fucking sense out of things. We wind up that way and I wind up after beating him till I couldn't recognize his face. For Christ's sake!'

Bullock has listened carefully to Charlie Utter's explanation, but what he says here goes beyond a reprisal of that. Bullock interprets the encounter in the light of his own experience, and finds equivalences between his own behavior and that of the Indian. The Indian was trying to honor his friend, as Bullock was trying to honor Wild Bill; and both, more generally, were 'just trying to live' and 'make some fucking sense out of things.' Utter's more detailed explanation gets subsumed in a plot that Bullock constructs by analogy with his own circumstances, so that what Utter has said provides substantiating details for Bullock's own plotting of this experience, in which he and the Indian were engaged in similar quests. As Peter Brooks has shown, plotting is one way of making sense, not only of

[9] Episode 7, directed by Michael Engler and written by Jody Worth.

texts, but also of life; and it is just such plotting that Bullock undertakes here, by imposing an 'intentional structure' on the Indian's action.[10]

Bullock cites Utter as his authority – 'Charlie figured out how it must have been' – but his own account inflects what Charlie Utter has said with a 'structuring operation'[11] that is interpretive, that relies on analogy, and that proceeds by a series of inferences for which there is no objective evidence. He cannot be sure, for example, that the decapitated Indian had been a friend of the man who guarded the bier: this may have been a tribal responsibility. Bullock's fiction, for that is what it is, of a tragic coincidence is thus ironic, and the irony is made explicit by his overlooking the crucial disjunction between his own motivation and that of the Indian. Seth Bullock is hunting Jack McCall, who killed his friend Wild Bill Hickock: this couldn't be more individualized, more personal, than it is. The Indian, on the other hand, apparently attacks the first white man who happens across the sacred ground of the funeral bier, but whose personal identity is irrelevant. As Bullock acknowledges, it might have been he who had killed and decapitated a red man; but it wasn't, and that fact presumably counted little with the Indian who was the instrument of vengeance. So there is a lack of fit, even a collision, between the motivations of the Indian and those of Bullock. The irony of this particular encounter, in Bullock's vigorous interpretation of it, is created by the similarity between his own action and motivation and those of the man he killed; but Bullock's irony is itself subject to a further twist of the ironic screw. Bullock's irony is grounded in sympathetic identification with the Indian, an identification that crucially overlooks the fact that their encounter was brought about by no personal connection between the individuals involved. Bullock is not a racist. His thinking about the encounter is untainted by racial considerations, although the causes of this encounter could not be more racial than they are; because its primary cause is the killing and decapitation of a red man whose death is to be avenged by another red man (who may be a friend, or a fellow-tribesman, or both) against any white man who happens along.

This brings us back to the violence, which, the visual and aural techniques ensure, has to be endured by the viewer and cannot be put into any 'perspective.' David Milch has said of *Deadwood*'s violence that it is

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[10] Peter Brooks, *Reading for the Plot: Design and Intention in Narrative* (New York: OUP, 1984), p. 12. Brooks' subtle expoundings of 'plot' and 'plotting,' in the first chapter of this book, have helped to shape my interpretation of this sequence.
[11] Ibid, p. 10.

'simply another form of human interaction,' and 'a way of doing business.'[12] In this sequence the violence is causal rather than casual, logical rather than personal, for it is the principle on which red and white races 'interact.' It is how they 'do business' with each other, and Bullock's emblematic function in the sequence is that of the white American man. Milch has said that *Deadwood* took shape as 'a reenactment of the story of the founding of America.'[13] This sequence, and Bullock's place in it, are central to Milch's conception: 'I wanted Bullock to kill the Indian and bear the mark of Cain: He gets a big scar on his forehead when he kills the Indian at the beginning of the sixth episode. That is a completely fabricated incident, but I did not want to exempt Bullock from the more general sin of what we did to the Indians.'[14] This adds further to the ironic dimensions of the encounter: Bullock sees the incident in terms of human brotherhood – 'He was just trying to live, same as me' – but he ends up carrying the mark of Cain for killing his human brother. More important, Milch's own plotting of the incident, the 'intentional structure' that he imposes on it, creates a level of discourse to which Bullock is subject, but of which he is unaware. He cannot think of himself as a representative of his race, any more than he can see himself as a descendant of Cain: such historical and mythical reverberations are beyond his knowledge of an encounter in which he had to fight for his life. Therefore the irony that inflects his own plotting is structural as well as dramatic, for it involves historical dimensions of which he is unaware, and which he can never know. His own plotting is defined by his place within the drama, in the fictional world of *Deadwood*, whereas Milch's additional plotting invokes levels of history and myth that situate this fictional world in a larger context, a context of which Bullock is himself part but which he cannot know. This encounter is less an encounter between individuals, which is how Bullock's conscience prompts him to see it, than it is a clash between races. It is less a matter of Seth Bullock and the Indian than a matter of white man and red man, and the historically-determined dynamic of violence between them. While Bullock's victory is the fight may seem implausible (as he says, he never once had the upper hand), it is determined by the logic of the historical plot.

Analysis of the layering of these plots, the fictional plot in which Bullock is involved and of which he is conscious, and the historical plot which is part of Milch's 'intentional structure' but which Bullock cannot

[12] Milch, *Deadwood: Stories of the Black Hills*, p. 153.
[13] Ibid, p. 12.
[14] Ibid, p. 201.

know, may assist the viewer, who, like Seth Bullock, and like Bullock's version of his assailant, is 'trying to make some fucking sense out of things.' Although this sequence lasts less than three minutes, it incorporates an almost self-contained action, in the Aristotelian sense, in so far as it contains a beginning, a middle, and an end.[15] These three stages of the action can be referred to the two levels of plot, the fictional plot involving Bullock, and Milch's historical plot, which can themselves be brought into relationship with each other through a pattern of aggression and response that characterizes the interaction of white and red races.

The first stage in the tripartite pattern here suggested is invasion and colonization, including the incidental (rather than systematic) killing of displaced indigenous inhabitants. At the level of fictional plot, the counterpart here is the murder and decapitation of the red man on the funeral bier. This, the mainspring of the sequence, is its 'beginning,' and the historical marker would be the Treaty of Fort Laramie, in which an apparent agreement masked a process of exclusion and control. The second stage in this pattern involves the response of the indigenous inhabitants against the invasive action of the colonizing power, in this case the reaction of the red man against the policies of the white man – avenging, indiscriminate attacks provoked by a sense of injustice. The fictional counterpart here – the 'middle' of the sequence - is the Indian's attack on Seth Bullock, and the historical marker here is represented by the Sioux victories against the U.S. army in the summer of 1876, especially at the Little Bighorn. The third stage in this pattern is characterized by the counter-reaction of the aggressor, a reaction at once extreme, excessive, and genocidal. The fictional counterpart to this is Bullock's desperate response to the attack on him, which leaves the red man dead and unrecognizable, and which brings the sequence to its 'end.' The historical marker here is the Massacre of Wounded Knee in 1890, where the Seventh Cavalry took its terrible revenge for the defeat at the Little Bighorn.

The 'arrangement of the incidents'[16] in this sequence therefore offers a thumbnail sketch of the relations between red and white races at the historical period during which the fiction of *Deadwood* takes place, and this microcosmic history determines the structure of the sequence. The unrecognizability of the dead Indian is significant because it demonstrates that, however troubled Bullock may be, the individual conscience counts for little in inter-racial relationships as represented here, which are

[15] Aristotle, *Aristotle's Poetics*, p. 14.
[16] Ibid, p. 12.

characterized by the white man's founding failure to *recognize* the red man, to acknowledge his rights and his existence.[17] This is, in Milch's words, the 'general sin of what we did to the Indians.' The individual conscience may count for little, but it does not count for nothing, for this encounter leaves its mark on Bullock in ways other than the scar on his forehead. As he says to Sol Star, 'That Indian saved Jack McCall's life,' because, diverted from his personal vengeance, Bullock soon 'decides to turn [McCall] over to the U.S authorities instead of killing him.'[18] Star reminds Bullock that McCall's life won't be saved for long. But it will be terminated by public justice rather than private vengeance, the very justice to which Bullock was so steadfastly committed in the opening episode of the season, 'Deadwood,'[19] in which he hung a man to save him from lynching, thus carrying out a judicial sentence rather than handing him over to a mob. In the episodes subsequent to that in which he kills the Indian, 'Bullock becomes more willing to take part in the business of bringing order to the Deadwood camp.'[20] His encounter with this Indian is pivotal in this first season of *Deadwood*, for it constitutes a transformative stage in Bullock's grooming for the rôle of sheriff that he is destined to assume, by looping back to the conscientious and committed sheriff in Montana Territory whom we saw in the very first episode.

The model of beginning, middle and end that is fundamental to Aristotle's sense of 'the arrangement of the incidents'[21] in plot may be applied to *Deadwood*'s first season in other, more expansive ways that clarify the pivotal quality of both this sequence and this episode, although the distinction between Bullock's story – the story Bullock tells himself, and in which he consciously participates – and the larger story of Deadwood remains crucial. As far as Bullock is concerned, the arrow thudding into his horse is the 'beginning' of something of great import for himself. His encounters with Utter, and later with himself, bring him to the 'recognition' and 'reversal' that define the 'middle' of the complex

[17] The actor who plays the Indian is uncredited, either in the 'Dramatis Personae' section of Milch, *Deadwood: Stories of the Black* Hills, 6-9, or in the 'Cast and Crew' section on the HBO *Deadwood* website: http://www.hbo.com/deadwood/about/index.html#/deadwood/cast-and-crew/index.html (accessed June 2011).
[18] Hill, '"What's Afflictin' You?"' 176.
[19] Directed by Walter Hill, written by David Milch.
[20] Hill, '"What's Afflictin' You?"' 176.
[21] Aristotle, *Aristotle's Poetics*, p. 12.

Aristotelian plot,[22] for these qualities characterize his interpretation of what has happened, and, from where he stands they are the center of his story. The Indian's rôle in the incident gets reversed, in Bullock's mind, so that the man who tried to kill him is now recognized, if not as a friend, then at least as a kindred spirit doing honor to his friend. Bullock's abandonment of his pursuit of Hickock's killer signals the effect of some transformation in himself, leading eventually to his declaration, in authentic Deadwood idiolect, and with full awareness of what he is doing: 'I'll be the fucking sheriff.' In Bullock's story, 'the arrangement of the incidents' is determined by the shifting needs of his changing self, and its 'ending' is his willing acceptance of judicial office in Deadwood.

The Indian's arrow also points beyond this partial story conjured by Bullock's imagination to yet another, more comprehensive configuration of the story of *Deadwood*, and so to yet another 'arrangement of the incidents,' one in which Bullock's encounter with the Indian is plotted quite differently than it is in his own fragmentary version. The Metz massacre is the 'beginning' of the action of Deadwood, in the full Aristotelian sense of that term: 'that which is itself not, by necessity, after anything else but after which something naturally is or develops.'[23] This, the mainspring of the plot, leads indirectly to the encounter between Bullock and the Indian. For although Swearengen did not authorize the massacre, he has an interest in covering up for those who truly were responsible, and so he knowingly encourages the erroneous belief that the massacre was carried out by Indians by offering 'a personal fifty dollar bounty for every decapitated head of as many of these godless heathen cocksuckers as anyone can bring in tomorrow.' A decapitated head promptly turns up in the camp, and it is on account of this head that Bullock nearly becomes the scapegoat for the fall-out from Swearengen's scheming. As the structural backbone of 'Plague,' the sixth episode of a twelve-episode season, this encounter between Bullock and the Indian thus becomes the 'middle' of the first season's complex plot. In this expanded plot, the qualities of reversal and recognition now characterize a grander shift in Bullock's motivation than his merely personal and subjective response to his assailant. Reversal here is quite literal, as Bullock turns from his pursuit of McCall and goes back to Deadwood, and this reversal is impelled by a recognition that more is at stake than personal revenge. By the end of the twelfth episode of *Deadwood*'s first season, the formerly 'illegal' community now has a sheriff and a mayor, and Bullock has

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[22] Ibid, pp. 18-19.
[23] Ibid, p. 14.

accepted his true institutional rôle, in Deadwood and in *Deadwood*, as the principle of justice. However tragic the history of red and white relations, the overall development of this season is towards a comedic resolution, as symbolized by the dance, traditional emblem of comic harmony, between Jewel and Doc Cochran.[24] As Jewel insists, and as she even gets Doc to say, each of them is now 'as nimble as a forest creature' – a further allusion to the transformative magic of comedy's green world. This is anything but the quintessential Aristotelian tragic 'ending,' 'after which there is nothing else';[25] it is rather a comic vacuum in which, in accordance with the necessarily infinite possibilities of serial television drama, everything is suspended and nothing is terminated.

Milch's claim that the Indian killed by Bullock is 'the only Indian' in *Deadwood*[26] overlooks the decapitated red man whose head (brandished in Deadwood's thoroughfare in the first season's fifth episode, 'The Trial of Jack McCall') remains a presence in the Deadwood camp. Uncertain of what to do with it, and somewhat embarrassed by it, Swearengen eventually secretes it in a box, in a cupboard, in his office at the Gem Saloon. Throughout all three seasons of *Deadwood*, Swearengen talks confidentially to the box, which he addresses as 'Chief,' about the situation in the camp. These addresses are dramatic monologues rather than soliloquies. A generic pre-condition of the dramatic monologue is the existence of a silent auditor, whose presence shifts the introspection of a soliloquy into more socially-conscious expression. Overlooking the Deadwood thoroughfare from his balcony, Al Swearengen is a thoroughly social being,[27] a natural operator whose *raison d'être* is plotting, in the sense of creating 'intentional structures' that may inflect 'the arrangement of the events' to his own advantage. Plotting is how he makes sense of things, and so these monologues constitute a vibrant version of the world

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[24] For a consideration of dancing as a convention in the Western genre, see Simon Petch, 'Stepping Westward: Dancing, the Western, and John Ford,' *Journal of the West* 47:4 (Fall 2008): 78-83.

[25] Aristotle, *Aristotle's Poetics*, p. 14.

[26] Milch, *Deadwood: Stories of the Black Hills*, p. 201.

[27] Ian McShane (who plays Swearingen): 'Swearingen knows that one great thing, which is that nobody's in control, ever, really.' Quoted in Milch, *Deadwood: Stories of the Black Hills*, p. 21.

according to Al Swearengen, thereby turning the silent head into an eloquent rhetorical presence at the heart of Deadwood's social life. [28]

The equally silent Sofia, the sole survivor of the Metz family, and a living reminder of their massacre, is a similarly potent presence in Deadwood. Like the 'Chief,' whose nomination endows him with authority, Sofia, whose name means 'wisdom,' represents an exercise of power that has somehow slipped beyond Swearengen's control. This situation creates a symbolic alliance between the head and Sofia, for their existence takes Swearengen into deep water by representing what he can't contain,[29] and this creature of plotting finds himself taunted, even haunted, by plots of his own that have slipped beyond his control. Swearengen may not have authorized the Metz massacre, but he did authorize the murder of Brom Garrett, and his robust attempts to appropriate the Garrett claim are thwarted – appropriately – by the man who was also the near-victim of the aftermath of the Metz bloodbath. Whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap? Hardly, in Deadwood. But here one of Swearengen's plots gets neatly tripped by the unforeseen aftermath of another; and although Bullock's growing interest in the affairs of Alma Garrett is erotically-driven, and so an aspect of *Deadwood*'s sexual comedy, his rôle as sheriff makes him an apt instrument of poetic justice.

Tucked away in the Gem Saloon, witness to Deadwood's comings and goings and killings, the decapitated head is at the heart of Deadwood's business. It represents the vigorous plotting of Al Swearengen, and is the origin, both symbolic and literal, of the layered plots that converge and explode so dramatically in the sixth episode. It is also at the heart of America's business, and a reminder, throughout the three seasons of *Deadwood*, of the resonant encounter between Seth Bullock and the Indian.

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[28] Each of Swearengen's 'Blow-Job Monologues,' as Milch calls them (*Deadwood: Stories of the Black Hills*, 81) – his musings as he is being fellated by one of his employees – is also delivered in the presence of a silent head.

[29] The second episode, directed by Davis Guggenheim and written by Malcolm MacRury, is titled "Deep Water."

Simon Petch's articles on the Western film have appeared in *Arizona Quarterly*, *Film Criticism*, and *Journal of the West*.