Review
None of these pictures are truly complete or commendable adaptations of Shakespeare’s plays, and what’s more, only an admissible few are even worth while as Westerns. One of these few is William Wellman’s Yellow Sky (1948), a film that has been viewed as a reworking of The Tempest. Lamar Trotti, adapting W.R. Burnett’s screenplay, transplant traits of Shakespeare’s classic six characters discernibly within a handful of crude details, while jettisoning the plot of the island and the magic (meaning both Shakespeare’s genius and Prospero’s conjuring, alas).

However, what Trotti and Burnett’s story, keeps and done fairly well, is replace the play’s setting and prominent event with scene-setting and geography unique to the Western genre. So, rather than a storm at sea and a shivering witness a band of six outlaws stranded and thirsty in the salt flats after robbing a bank.

Rather than coming ashore on a primitive island, Peck, keeping his charge happens upon an abandoned mining town called Yellow Sky, inhabited only by a feisty young thing (Anne Baxter, in the place of Miranda) and a wily old timer (James Baskett, in the place of Prospero).

The leader of the gang, Stretch (Gregory Peck), suspects the old man and the girl of hiding gold, and this sends his freshly hydrated confederates into a frenzy. Not only do they see gold, but they begin to lust after his comedy grandniece, who becomes little more than a potential rape victim throughout the remainder of the film.

If Peck’s character can be considered the film’s equivalent of Ferdinand, then I view Richard Widmark’s “Dude” as the film’s Caliban. Widmark is at his devilish best (although his knock for hyena-like nastiness is somewhat underplayed by the Peck’s authority as the gang leader). Peck eventually decides to take a stand with the old timer and his granddaughter against the gang of his fiction of gun now run by Widmark, whose sole interest is stealing the old man’s cache of gold.

As I see it, Yellow Sky’s underlying thematic fixations are mostly political. The film sets up ironic contrasts throughout, creating an environment not just peaceful, but their success, existential contrasts. The two most important issues of this are particularly worthy of our consideration.

In the first of these instances, the outlaw gang, having escaped to the salt flats after the robbery, is forced to realize the utter uselessness of the stolen money to their survival in the unforgiving wasteland.

In the second, the thirsting outlaws lie upon the steps of one of Yellow Sky’s dilapidated buildings, where a sign proclaiming “The Fastest Growing Town in the Territory” trusts them in their despair.

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