

American Museum of Western Art – The Anschutz Collection
Writing the West: Season 7, February 2026
Traditional Western: Town-Tamer

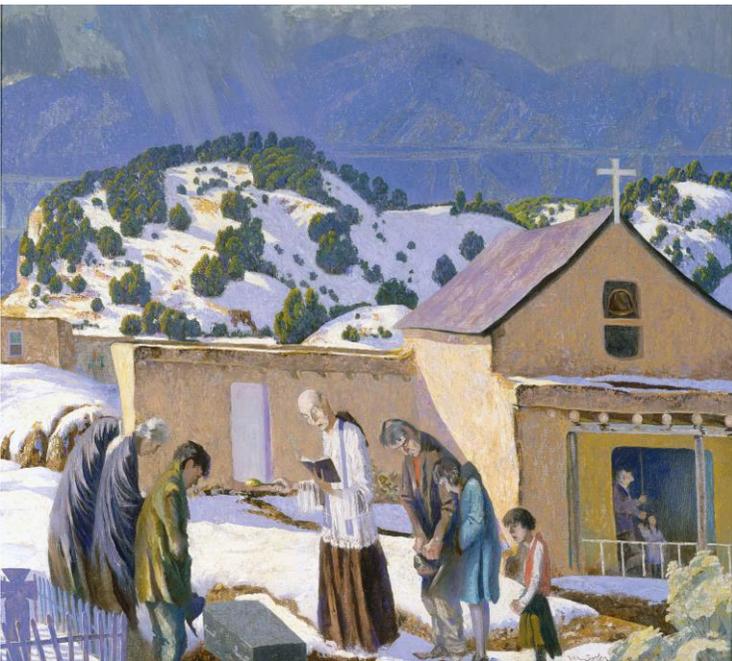
The Town-Tamer subgenre of the Traditional Western typically features a frontier town on the edge of chaos. Violent cowhands, corrupt governors or mayors, outlaws, hired thugs, all are brought to justice by a skilled gun-for-hire who often, although not always, works alone. Sounds easy, and a lot of Town-Tamer stories usually are. But what if taming a town brought about unforeseen consequences for the gun-for-hire hero? What if he or she gets compromised? Now, a seemingly simple story becomes more complicated, thus, more interesting.

Ernest-Étienne Narjot de Francheville, *The Escape*, 1886 & *The Banditos' Camp*, 1886:



Use these two paintings to describe a town in chaos. What is happening to the town? Why is it in such bad disorder? Are bandits constantly raiding it for supplies? Has the town's mayor secretly hired raiders to rob the town, claiming the bulk of the profit for himself? After choosing your chaotic scenario, bring in the gun-for-hire. Who is he or she? What skills do they have to tame this town?

Theodore van Soelen, *Burial*, ca. 1928:



Fast-forward to after the taming. The gun-for-hire has saved the day. However, everything has changed, including the town-tamer. What emotional or moral compromises have they had to make? In other words, do they feel heroic, remorseful, corrupt? Describe the gun-for-hire's new state of mind post-taming