VI

Tragic Features in John Ford's *The Searchers*

Martin M. Winkler

One of the chief reasons for the lasting appeal of Greek tragedy lies in its mythical nature. With their archetypal qualities, myths are the foundation of tragedy. In modern societies, too, myths have preserved much of their appeal, although today they often appear in a diluted or not readily apparent form. In American culture, the mythology of the West has given twentieth-century literature and art one of its enduring new archetypes: that of the westerner. In ways comparable to the Greek tragedians' use of received mythology for social, political, and moral reflection on their day and age, the myths of the West have frequently been used for similar purposes. In the words of director Sam Peckinpah: "The Western is a universal frame within which it is possible to comment on today."[1]

The mythology of the western hero bears obvious parallels to classical hero myths; such major themes as the quest, arms and violence, and even immortality, a crucial aspect of archaic and other mythologies, recur prominently in the comparatively recent myths surrounding the westerner.[2] The greatest significance and the highest emotional and intellectual appeal which can derive from the figure of the westerner are to be found in films that merit our attention as works of art. As in the classical cultures, the archetypes underlying mythology manifest themselves to best effect when they have been reworked into the unity of a literary—or literate—work. The principal genres in which this process took place in ancient Greece are epic and drama; in the *Poetics*, Aristotle makes no generic distinction between these two.[3] The popular stories of myth transcend their nonliterary origins when they are molded into the masterpieces of Homer and Hesiod, of Aeschylus, Sophocles, Euripides, and of a number of other authors whose works have not survived. A parallel process obtains for the myth of the American West. Well-known plots and figures reappear in the cinema, particularly in the films of such acknowledged masters of the genre as John Ford, Howard Hawks, Anthony Mann, and Sam Peckinpah.

The best western films can, and often do, exhibit the features of tragedy which Aristotle discussed well over two thousand years before the history and mythology of the American West came into existence. I will outline some of the chief aspects of tragedy in connection with the western film and then turn to a particular film, John Ford's *The Searchers* (1956).

1. Tragedy and the Western

In his *Poetics*, Aristotle takes as his point of departure the concept of mimesis. Poetry, drama, and music are all forms of representation or imitation, and so is the cinema.[4] To Aristotle, tragedy is a representation of action and life. He defines it as follows:

> Tragedy, then, is a representation of an action which is serious, complete, and of a certain magnitude—in language which is garnished in various forms in its different parts—in the mode of dramatic enactment, not narrative—and through the arousal of pity [*eleos*] and fear [*phobos*] effecting the *katharsis* of such emotions.[5]

1. The quotation is taken from Paul Seydor, *Peckinpah: The Western Films: A Reconsideration* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1997), 362.

2. I have traced parallels between classical mythological heroes and the western hero in "Classical Mythology and the Western Film," *Comparative Literature Studies*, 22 (1985), 516–540, and in "Homeric *kleos* and the Western Film," *Syllecta Classica*, 7 (1996), 43–54. On the history and mythology of the western and its origins see especially Henry Nash Smith, *Virgin Land: The American West as Symbol and Myth* (1950; rpt. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1978), 51–120.

3. Aristotle discusses the links between epic and tragedy in chapters 4, 5, 23, 24, and 26 of the *Poetics*. On tragedy in Homer see, for example, James M. Redfield, *Nature and Culture in the "Iliad": The Tragedy of Hector*, 2nd ed. (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1994). Aeschylus, who wrote a trilogy about Achilles which has not come down to us, considered his tragedies to be "slices from the large meals of Homer" (Athenaeus, *The Deipnosophists* 8.347e).

4. *Poetics*, chapter 3 (1448a19–b3). On classical mimesis see, for example, Stephen Halliwell, *Aristotle's Poetics* (1986; rpt. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 109–137; on mimesis and film see Gerald Mast, *Film/Cinema/Movie* (1977; rpt. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983), 38–61.

5. *Poetics* 6.2 (1449b24–28); the translation is from Halliwell, *The Poetics of Aristotle: Translation and Commentary* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1987), 37.

Representation naturally resides in and is carried out by the actors appearing on the stage, most importantly by the tragic protagonist, who, according to Aristotle, should be neither wholly good nor wholly evil but rather someone with whom we may identify despite the extremity of his situation or fate: "Such a man is one who is not preeminent in virtue and justice, and one who falls into affliction not because of evil and wickedness, but because of a certain fallibility (*hamartia*)."[6] The spectator is affected by his realization that what takes place on stage may happen to himself: "There, but for the grace of God, go I." From such an understanding derives a heightened awareness of the frailty of human life, the fickleness and unpredictability of fortune, and ultimately a greater consciousness of the bond that holds mankind together: "pity is felt towards one whose affliction is undeserved, fear towards one who is like ourselves."[7]

Such pity and fear are linked to the suffering and violence which the principal characters, and often the chorus as well, must undergo. According to Aristotle, violence and suffering inflicted by and upon family members in particular increase the viewer's emotional involvement.[8] Pity and fear, previously latent emotions, are thus stirred up and accumulate in the spectator. This intense strain is broken at the drama's climax; in Aristotle's words, the viewer is purged of his heightened sensations of pity and fear by means of catharsis. Originally a term used in ancient Greek medicine, *catharsis*—traditionally rendered in English as either "purification" or "purgation"—restores emotional balance and leads to a temporary psychological calm, even numbness. The decrease in emotional excitement, which catharsis effects, brings about a feeling of pleasurable relief.[9] Psychologically and emotionally the spectator, who has become one with the protagonist, is now released from this identification. To employ a phrase from Aeschylus, the protagonist's suffering (*pathos*) arouses pity and fear; this in turn brings about a learning process (*mathos*) in the viewer.[10] Tragic mimesis and catharsis provide for an increase in knowledge and moral insight.

In order for the viewer's learning process to be effective, the tragic protagonist is placed in a situation where he must decide on a course of

6. *Poetics* 13.3 (1453a7–10); quoted from Halliwell, *The* Poetics *of Aristotle*, 44.

7. *Poetics* 13.2 (1453a5–6); quoted from Halliwell, *The* Poetics *of Aristotle*, 44. On tragedy's timeless quality see, for example, Albin Lesky, *Die griechische Tragödie*, 5th ed. (Stuttgart: Kröner, 1984), 22–23.

8. *Poetics*, chapter 14 (1453b1–1454a15).

9. For a modern examination of the evidence and the controversies surrounding Aristotelian catharsis see Halliwell, *Aristotle's Poetics*, 168–201 and 350–356.

10. Aeschylus, *Agamemnon* 177: *pathêi mathos* ("learning through suffering"); see also lines 249–250.

action. His ethical dilemma arises from the fact that he becomes guilty whichever decision he makes; Aeschylus especially confronts his characters "with dilemmas where there is a conflict of duties such that while a choice is morally imperative, none is morally possible."[11] At the same time, however, the protagonist is innocent on another level. Oedipus, to cite only the most famous example, is objectively guilty of parricide and incest but is subjectively innocent because of, for example, an absence of evil intentions. Nevertheless he accepts the responsibility for his deeds. The simultaneous presence of guilt and innocence in the hero is one of the chief characteristics of Greek tragedy, one of its most complex and fascinating features.

This question of innocence and guilt is also important for western films, since they employ mythical archetypes for its story patterns. Standard westerns present us with a protagonist who is excessively good and strong; being one-dimensional, he remains outside serious consideration as a figure of art. But when the westerner, like the hero on the tragic stage, becomes morally questionable, the genre transcends the limits of popular entertainment.[12] As Robert Warshow has observed in his now classic essay on the westerner:

> The truth is that the westerner comes into the field of serious art only when his moral code, without ceasing to be compelling, is seen also to be imperfect. The westerner at his best exhibits a moral ambiguity which darkens his image and saves him from absurdity; this ambiguity arises from the fact that, whatever his justifications, he is a killer of men.[13]

The westerner must both act and react: act in order to preserve his status as hero, react—usually to injustice and violence—to preserve his moral

11. Benjamin Apthorp Gould Fuller, "The Conflict of Moral Obligation in the Trilogy of Aeschylus," *Harvard Theological Review*, 8 (1915), 459–479; quotation at 460. Richmond Lattimore, *Story Patterns in Greek Tragedy* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1964; rpt. 1969), 29–49, gives a detailed discussion.

12. On formula and genre in American literature and film see in particular John G. Cawelti, *Adventure, Mystery, and Romance: Formula Stories as Art and Popular Culture* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1976), especially 192–259, and *The Six-Gun Mystique Sequel* (Bowling Green, Ky.: Bowling Green State University Popular Press, 1999), especially 11–56; also Stanley I. Solomon, *Beyond Formula: American Film Genres* (Chicago: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1976), 12–29. See also Joseph W. Reed, *Three American Originals: John Ford, William Faulkner, and Charles Ives* (Middletown, Conn.: Wesleyan University Press, 1984; rpt. 1987), 143–149.

13. Robert Warshow, "The Westerner," in *The Immediate Experience: Movies, Comics, Theatre and Other Aspects of Popular Culture* (1962; rpt. New York: Atheneum, 1979), 135–154; quotation at 142. Warshow's essay first appeared in *Partisan Review*, 21 (1954), 190–203.

integrity. Thus forced into action, he is often confronted with a situation that compels him to make a choice. In those films which leave behind the stereotypical "good guy vs. bad guy" format in favor of a more complex and psychologically convincing plot, the westerner may face conflicting alliances and responsibilities; in choosing a course of action, he is confronted with a problem comparable to that of the tragic protagonist. A well-known example is Fred Zinnemann's *High Noon* (1952), in which the hero is caught in a triple bind: responsibility to his wife, to and for the citizens of his town, and to himself. (He must not abandon his code of honor.) Another example is Victor Fleming's *The Virginian* (1929), an archetypal western based on the novel by Owen Wister. Here the villain has lured the eponymous hero's close friend into stealing cattle; the Virginian, leader of the posse pursuing the thieves, must himself bring about the death of his friend when the latter has been caught. Warshow's observations on the "seriousness of the West" as exemplified in this film serve well to illustrate the similarities between the westerner and the hero of Greek tragedy:

> The Virginian is thus in a tragic dilemma where one moral absolute conflicts with another and the choice of either must leave a moral stain. . . . the movie is a tragedy, for though the hero escapes with his life, he has been forced to confront the ultimate limits of his moral ideas.

The tragic quality of the serious western film gives this genre its "mature sense of limitation and unavoidable guilt." As do the heroes of drama both ancient and modern, the hero of the western affects us by an appeal to our sense of compassion; in Warshow's words: "what we finally respond to is not his victory but his defeat."[14] Ultimately, the westerner is a modern reincarnation of the archetypal mythic and tragic hero; hence largely his universal appeal.[15]

The complexity of the westerner, in which he is again comparable to some of the classical tragic heroes, may be illustrated by the duality of his nature, which combines rationality, experience, ingenuity, and love

14. The quotations are from Warshow, "The Westerner," 142–143.

15. Warshow, "The Westerner," 154: "The Western hero is necessarily an archaic figure." On the universality of the westerner, exemplified by the eponymous hero of George Stevens's *Shane* (1953), see Warshow, 150–151. The film's review in the *Motion Picture Herald* saw in it "the inevitability of the ancient Greek tragedy"; quoted from Michael Coyne, *The Crowded Prairie: American National Identity in the Hollywood Western* (London: Tauris, 1997), 75. Peter A. French, *Cowboy Metaphysics: Ethics and Death in Westerns* (Lanham, Md.: Rowman and Littlefield, 1997), examines the western as a popular morality play and has frequent recourse to ancient tragedy and to Aristotle.

for peace with violence and destruction. On the Greek stage, it is particularly an authority figure such as the king, ruler of his city-state, who is caught between the demands of order, peace, and justice to ensure the stability and survival of the city and, on the other hand, the urges, often irrational and violent, to impose his views on others and to force them into submission. Even with the best intentions his power can lead him into suspicion, arrogance, oppression of dissenters, and a violent crushing of sometimes only imagined opposition. Examples are Sophocles' Oedipus and Creon in *Oedipus the King* and Euripides' Pentheus in the *Bacchae*. In the western film we find a corresponding figure in the harsh patriarch who rules with an iron fist over his cattle empire; a good example, to mention only one, is found in Edward Dmytryk's *Broken Lance* (1954), a film with overtones of Shakespeare's *King Lear*. The dual nature of the westerner usually shows itself in his being paired with a badman who is in many ways the hero's alter ego. The hero and his opponent often represent two sides of the same coin; their antagonism, sometimes postponed by an uneasy temporary alliance, finally erupts in a violent showdown at the film's climax. Direct echoes of Greek tragedy by way of intrafamilial and Oedipal conflicts appear in King Vidor's *Duel in the Sun* (1946) and Howard Hawks's *Red River* (1948). Many of Anthony Mann's films reveal this director's preoccupation with both Greek and Elizabethan tragedy: his film *Winchester 73* (1950) shows the hero's revenge on his brother who had killed their father, and *The Man from Laramie* (1955), an even more accomplished work, further deepens the kinds of conflict with which the earlier film had dealt.[16] The revenge theme in the western film derives in no small degree from a literary tradition, that of Jacobean drama, which in turn ultimately derives from classical Greek and Roman tragedy. Screenwriter Philip Yordan aimed at tragedy in several of the westerns he wrote:

> I have . . . attempted to discover again the purity of the heroes of classical tragedy. I have always wanted to re-create a tragic mythology, giving a large role to destiny, solitude, nobility. At the same time I've tried to join this type of hero to typically American characters.[17]

16. See Christopher Wicking and Barrie Pattison, "Interviews with Anthony Mann," *Screen*, 10 no. 4 (1969), 32–54, especially 41–42; and Jim Kitses, *Horizons West: Anthony Mann, Budd Boetticher, Sam Peckinpah: Studies of Authorship within the Western* (1969; rpt. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1980), 72–73 (also 46–59 and 73–77). At the time of his death Mann planned to film *King Lear* as a western (Kitses, 80). Borden Chase, one of the most distinguished western novelists and screenwriters, reverses his *Winchester 73* theme in his script for John Sturges's *Backlash* (1956) with the figure of a guilty father instead of a guilty son.

17. Quoted from *The BFI Companion to the Western*, ed. Edward Buscombe (London: Deutsch/British Film Institute, 1988; rpt. 1996), 397. The most remarkable of the

The use of the American West as a setting for tragedy appears to be an integral feature of American culture, going back at least as far as James Fenimore Cooper's *The Prairie* (1827). In this novel, the tragedy centers on Ishmael Bush, a patriarchal authority figure who metes out harsh and bloody justice to his brother-in-law, who had killed Bush's son.[18] Contemporary to the actual settlement of the West, tragic archetypes were already inspiring the imagination of popular novelists. This tradition continued in the twentieth century with, for example, the western novels of Max Brand. More recently, Frederick Manfred's novel *King of Spades* (1966) presents a thinly disguised retelling of the Oedipus myth set in the West. With the cinema superseding literature as the chief medium of popular American culture, it is not surprising that one of the foremost examples of the tragic hero can be encountered in what is generally acknowledged to be the most important work by John Ford, America's greatest filmmaker. To this film I now turn. Since the tragic nature of *The Searchers* is most clearly present in Ford's film but largely missing from its source, the 1954 novel by Alan LeMay, I proceed from the assumption that Ford, as director, is to be credited for *The Searchers* being the enduring work of popular art that it is.[19] This not only is in keeping with the auteur theory of cinema but also parallels the practice of ancient and later tragedians of using received material which they then turned into their lasting works of art.[20]

films written or cowritten by Yordan are Nicholas Ray's *Johnny Guitar* (1953), Mann's *The Man from Laramie*, Henry King's *The Bravados* (1958), and Andre de Toth's *Day of the Outlaw* (1959). On revenge tragedy see Anne Pippin Burnett, *Revenge in Attic and Later Tragedy* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998).

18. On *The Prairie* see D. H. Lawrence, *Studies in Classic American Literature* (1923; rpt. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1981), 62–63; Smith, *Virgin Land*, 221–222; and Cawelti, *Adventure, Mystery, and Romance*, 201–202. See also Eric Rohmer, "Rediscovering America," tr. Liz Heron, in *Cahiers du Cinéma: The 1950s*, ed. Jim Hillier (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1985), 88–93, especially 90–91.

19. Some of the differences between the novel and the film are discussed by James Van Dyck Card, "The 'Searchers' by Alan LeMay and by John Ford," *Literature/Film Quarterly*, 16 (1988), 2–9. The screenplay by Frank Nugent, Ford's most congenial collaborator, falls short of conveying much of the starkness and emotional power of the film, serving Ford for no more than a rough guide. For a discussion of some of the significant changes from script to finished film, on which Ford decided during the actual filming and which illustrate his creative procedure, see Arthur M. Eckstein, "Darkening Ethan: John Ford's *The Searchers* (1956) from Novel to Screenplay to Screen," *Cinema Journal*, 38 no. 1 (1998), 3–24.

20. On the continuing importance of this theory, first articulated by François Truffaut, and on the larger question of authorship in film see, for example, Paisley Livingston, "Cinematic Authorship," and Berys Gaut, "Film Authorship and Collaboration," both in *Film Theory and Philosophy*, ed. Richard Allen and Murray Smith (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997), 132–148 and 149–172.

2. The Tragic Hero

In one of his influential articles, classical scholar Jean-Pierre Vernant asks the following questions about the tragic hero:

> What is this being that tragedy describes as a *deinos*, an incomprehensible and baffling monster, both an agent and one acted upon, guilty and innocent, lucid and blind, whose industrious mind can dominate the whole of nature yet who is incapable of governing himself? What is the relationship of this man to the actions upon which we see him deliberate on the stage and for which he takes the initiative and responsibility but whose real meaning is beyond him and escapes him so that it is not so much the agent who explains the action but rather the action that, revealing its true significance after the event, recoils upon the agent and discloses what he is and what he has really, unwittingly, done? Finally, what is this man's place in a world that is at once social, natural, divine, and ambiguous, rent by contradictions . . . ?[21]

We may apply these questions to Ethan Edwards, the central character in *The Searchers*, with regard to the film's tragic nature.[22]

21. Jean-Pierre Vernant, "Tensions and Ambiguities in Greek Tragedy," in Vernant and Pierre Vidal-Naquet, *Myth and Tragedy in Ancient Greece*, tr. Janet Lloyd (1981; rpt. New York: Zone Books, 1990), 29–48 and 417–422 (notes); quotation at 32.

22. The following are among the standard critical sources on John Ford; page references are to *The Searchers*: John Baxter, *The Cinema of John Ford* (New York: Barnes, 1971), 144–152; J. A. Place, *The Western Films of John Ford* (Secaucus, N.J.: Citadel Press, 1974), 160–173; Joseph McBride and Michael Wilmington, *John Ford* (1974; rpt. New York: Da Capo, 1975), 147–163; Andrew Sarris, *The John Ford Movie Mystery* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1976), 170–175; Peter Stowell, *John Ford* (Boston: Twayne, 1986), 122–140; Tag Gallagher, *John Ford: The Man and His Films* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986), 324–338; Ronald L. Davis, *John Ford: Hollywood's Old Master* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1995), 270–279; Scott Eyman, *Print the Legend: The Life and Times of John Ford* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1999), 442–450. Richard Slotkin, *Gunfighter Nation: The Myth of the Frontier in Twentieth-Century America* (1992; rpt. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1998), 461–473 and 737–738 (notes), Coyne, *The Crowded Prairie*, 76–78 and 203 (notes), and Sam B. Gurgis, *Hollywood Renaissance: The Cinema of Democracy in the Era of Ford, Capra, and Kazan* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 25–55 and 231–233 (notes), place *The Searchers* in the context of contemporary American politics and society. Not all of Slotkin's and Gurgis's observations are accurate or convincing. The chapter on *The Searchers* in Garry Wills, *John Wayne's America: The Politics of Celebrity* (1997; rpt. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1998), 251–261 and 346–347 (notes), briefly touches on Homer (as in its title, "The Fury of Ethan"), Greek tragedy, and Aristotle but does so with a superficial brevity surprising in an author with Wills's classical background. The chapter also contains a number of elementary factual errors about *The Searchers*. Harry Carey, Jr., *Company of Heroes: My Life as an Actor in the John Ford Stock Company* (Metuchen, N.J.: Scarecrow Press, 1994), 157–174, provides a look behind the scenes during the making of the film by one of its principal actors. Douglas Pye, "Writing and Reputation: *The Searchers*

Three years after the end of the Civil War, in which he had fought for the Confederacy, Ethan returns to his brother's homestead in the Texas wilderness, and, as if precipitated by his unexpected return, a series of catastrophes begins. Hostile Comanche Indians under their war chief Scar massacre Ethan's brother, sister-in-law, and nephew and abduct Ethan's two young nieces. Ethan, after many years still secretly in love with his brother's wife, embarks upon a desperate search for the girls, accompanied by Martin Pawley, a young man of partly Indian origin, whom the Edwardses had reared as their own son. When Ethan discovers the raped and mutilated body of his older niece Lucy, his determination to save Debbie, the younger girl, who could be his own daughter, grows even stronger. His search, however, remains unsuccessful for several years. His anguish and despair over Debbie then gradually change into a murderous obsession to kill her once he realizes that she has grown up and must have become one of Scar's wives.

Ethan is the psychologically most complex and ambivalent figure in the history of the western film. That Ford cast John Wayne, the archetypal icon of the westerner, in the part of a man "not conspicuous for virtue and justice" only enhances the film's dramatic power. In keeping with the heroic and tragic tradition, Ethan is first and foremost a man of action. After the end of the Civil War he has resorted to marauding; he possesses freshly minted dollars, and his description appears on several Wanted posters. Although fallen on hard times, he remains a figure of authority and does not hesitate to assert himself: "I'm giving the orders." The Confederate uniform coat which he still wears points to his former rank as officer and to his inability to adjust to a peaceful life. His own words characterize him well: "I still got my sabre . . . didn't turn it into no plowshare, neither." Violence is the key to Ethan's character; it exposes his increasing madness and viciousness in the course of the film. There is also a pronounced streak of racial bigotry toward Indians in Ethan. This reveals itself, for instance, in his gruff, even hostile, treatment of Martin, whom he has no scruples to use as bait for a trap. His ugly and crazed laugh at Martin's Indian bride underscores his hatred and contempt of Indians. In all likelihood, Ethan is such a racist because he is aware, without conscious knowledge, that he is in many ways like an Indian himself: savage, violent, and without a permanent home. Not only is Ethan well versed in Indian languages, customs, and religion but he also knows much about Indian strategy and psychology. He understands the diversionary tactics of Scar's raid and realizes that his only chance in catching up with Scar lies in a perseverance greater than the Indians'. A visual clue to the Indian aspects of his nature is the scabbard in which he keeps his rifle; it has long fringes and looks Indian-made. Ethan is a man who exists on the borderline between savagery and civilization.

1956–1976," in *Writing and Cinema*, ed. Jonathan Bignell (London: Longman, 1999), 195–209, summarizes the main critical views of the film.

That Ethan is by no means the usual clean-cut (and clean-shaven) western hero becomes overwhelmingly clear in the course of the film. Early on, he defiles a dead Indian's body by shooting the corpse's eyes out, an indication that his hatred of Indians goes even beyond death. Ethan's reason for this is his knowledge that, in the Indians' belief, such loss of sight will prevent their souls from entering the spirit land and condemn them "to wander forever between the winds." As startling and morally questionable as the defilement of a dead enemy's body is, it is nevertheless within the heroic tradition. In the *Iliad*, Achilles defiles Hector's corpse and, denying it proper burial, intends to prevent Hector's shade from entering the underworld; this is Achilles' ultimate revenge.[23] That Ethan, like Achilles, goes beyond the limits of heroic behavior becomes evident on several other occasions. At a skirmish with Scar's warriors by the riverside he attempts to shoot Indians whose backs are turned in retreat; later on, he sets a trap for the treacherous white trader Futterman and his two henchmen, killing all three by shooting them in the back. A close-up of Ethan's rifle at this point emphasizes that this act is in direct violation of the traditional code of honor usually upheld in the American western film.

I have earlier remarked on the duality of the western hero in terms of his close association with his antagonist, an association that points to the morality-play quality of the western film: the struggle between good and evil. A significant variation of this theme occurs in *The Searchers* in the figures of Ethan and Scar. Just as Ethan, despite his negative traits, is a superior westerner, Scar is a skillful leader. Both are heroes in their different ways. On two significant occasions in the film Ford emphasizes Scar's heroic nature by showing him putting on his war bonnet. The fact that both times Ethan then shoots Scar's horse from under him foreshadows the latter's eventual defeat and death. Before the skirmish at the river begins, Ford cuts from a close-up of Ethan directly to one of Scar, underscoring the tension between the two. A similar series of fast cuts occurs when Ethan, Martin, and Scar finally meet face to face in front of Scar's tent. Ford cuts from Scar to Ethan, back to Scar, and to Martin. In keeping with the heroic tradition, a verbal duel between Ethan and Scar

23. See Charles Segal, *The Theme of the Mutilation of the Corpse in the "Iliad"* (Leiden: Brill, 1971).

ensues, in which Ethan insults Scar, while Scar acknowledges Ethan's prowess and tenacity. The verbal parallelism in their exchange on language at this moment reinforces Ethan and Scar's closeness to each other. (Ethan: "Scar, eh? Plain to see how you got your name." Then: "You speak pretty good American—someone teach you?" Moments later, Scar has the last word on Ethan: "You speak good Comanch'—someone teach you?") Both men bear wounds, Scar physically, Ethan in his soul: "Scar, as the name suggests, is Ethan's mark of Cain."[24] That the part of Scar is played by a white actor takes on added meaning in this context.[25]

3. Journey into Madness

The motif of the search or quest is one of the basic themes of mythology; Jason and the Argonauts in classical and Parsifal's search for the Grail in medieval literature are prominent examples. Frequently in the mythological tradition of such travels, the hero's ultimate goal is the attainment of self-knowledge and the ideal of achieving moral goodness. For Ethan, however, the quest for his niece over several years is a journey not so much of glorious heroism as one of obsession and defeat, which will eventually drive him to the brink of madness. His fall into savagery during his search parallels and intensifies his social decline from army officer to renegade. In this as in other films by Ford, "the sense of duty that sustains his individuals also commonly leads them astray into aberrations or death."[26] In this regard Ethan resembles less the mythological hero of epic or the chivalrous knight of romance than the tragic sufferer of the Greek stage. Ethan's increasing obsession with finding his niece and avenging his family's destruction upon Scar, coupled with his racism toward the Indians, represents the film's true tragic theme. What Vernant observes about Eteocles in Aeschylus' *Seven against Thebes* may, with some adjustments, describe Ethan as well:

> The murderous madness that henceforth characterizes his *ethos* is not simply a human emotion; it is a daemonic power in every way beyond him. It envelops him in the black cloud of *ate*, penetrating him . . . from within, in a form of *mania*, a *lussa*, a delirium that breeds criminal acts of *hubris*.[27]

24. Stowell, *John Ford*, 135.
25. See McBride and Wilmington, *John Ford*, 152.
26. Gallagher, *John Ford*, 274.
27. Vernant, "Tensions and Ambiguity in Greek Tragedy," 35. The Greek terms mean "personality," "ruinous delusion," "madness," "rabid wrath," and "arrogance."

As H. A. Mason has noted: "The greatest poets have always found the greatest pathos by taking away from the hero's mind what we call the rational faculty and giving him a greater hold over us by making him *mad*."[28] It attests to the subtlety with which Ford structures the development of his narrative that the theme of Ethan's obsession is made explicit only intermittently and unobtrusively, and a casual viewer might overlook it. Nevertheless, its dramatic force increases steadily until it culminates in Ethan's last confrontation with Scar, by then dead. Added momentum derives from the underlying subject of miscegenation and sexual jealousy and frustration. The catalyst for this is Ethan's secret and hopeless love for his brother's wife. Ford introduces this topic as the starting point for the film.

The Searchers begins with the camera following Martha Edwards, Ethan's sister-in-law, as she opens the door of her house and walks out onto the porch, having noticed a horseman approaching. This moment contains the first indication of a close emotional bond between herself and Ethan, the man arriving, because cinematic tradition induces a viewer to assume that this woman is expecting the return of her husband. Martha is the first to greet Ethan, who responds by gently kissing her on the forehead. He later lifts up little Debbie as if she were his own daughter. Next morning, when Ethan prepares to leave with a posse of Texas Rangers led by the Reverend Clayton in order to retrieve the settlers' stolen cattle, Martha, gone to fetch Ethan's coat and thinking herself alone, tenderly strokes it. This gesture, however, is observed by Clayton, who discreetly turns his gaze away. His eyes speak volumes.[29] At the end of this moving and justly famous scene, Martha and Debbie wave and look after Ethan riding off, just as a departing man's wife and daughter would do. This is Martha's last glimpse of Ethan. With utter economy Ford here suggests a deep-seated but hopeless love between them. It is most likely because of this love that Ethan left his home years ago, joined the Confederate army, and stayed away for three years even after the war had ended. Ethan, the would-be husband of Martha, by extension becomes the would-be father of her children. This partly accounts for his unceasing pursuit of Scar, who had raped and killed the woman Ethan had chastely loved from afar. That Scar raped Martha before killing her may be inferred from the scene in

28. H. A. Mason, *The Tragic Plane* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985), 146.
29. On this brief moment see Andrew Sarris, *The American Cinema: Directors and Directions: 1929–1968* (1968; rpt. New York: Da Capo, 1996), 47, and *The John Ford Movie Mystery*, 172; see also Baxter, *The Cinema of John Ford*, 150, and Ford's own remarks in Peter Bogdanovich, *John Ford*, rev. ed. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978), 93–94.

which Ethan finds the bodies of Martha, his brother, and his nephew. Later Ethan will discover Lucy in a canyon where she had been abandoned after being raped and killed and probably mutilated as well; he buries her in the cloak that Martha had brought him before his departure. From now on his obsession to kill Scar and in this way to avenge Martha's dishonor becomes an overpowering force, which will relentlessly drive him on. Ethan knows that Scar has defiled and destroyed what has been unattainable and most sacred to himself. This is another bond between Ethan and Scar, perhaps the strongest one. At the outset of the search, Ethan is motivated by two powerful impulses: avenging Martha and rescuing Debbie, who could be his own daughter. A third driving force will eventually overshadow both of these.

Ford develops Ethan's journey into obsession and madness in psychologically convincing and, to the spectator, increasingly involving stages. First doubts about Ethan's mental state arise both in Martin Pawley and in the viewer when Ethan, reluctantly agreeing to take Martin and Brad Jorgensen, Lucy's boyfriend, with him on the search, asserts his authority over the two young men. This prompts Martin's question: "Just one reason we're here, ain't it? To find Debbie and Lucy?" Ethan does not reply, and suspicion begins to grow in Martin's mind, as it does in the spectator's, about Ethan's true motivation. Things are spelled out more clearly later when Ethan decides to turn back for the winter and to continue his search in the spring: "She's alive, she's safe for a while. They'll . . . keep her to raise as one of their own until—until she's of an age to . . ." He breaks off, but it is clear that Ethan is thinking of Martha's violation by Scar and of Debbie's future fate. That Scar will eventually force his captive into sexual relations with him represents, to Ethan's mind, a fate both worse than and worthy of death; that Scar will have had intercourse with both mother and daughter is a thought unbearable to him. This brief scene in the film marks the turning point in Ethan's character. From now on he is bent on revenge and destruction and will seek the deaths of Scar, Debbie, and of Indians in general. Ethan's suppressed intensity effectively contrasts with the quiet beauty of nature: a peaceful winter forest, gently falling snow, and complete silence. While nature is pure and calm, a violent rage is stirring in man.

The first open revelation of this occurs at the beginning of the film's cavalry sequence, which also takes place in winter. Ethan and Martin have come upon a herd of buffalo, and Ethan begins to shoot as many of them as he can. When Martin tries to prevent such meaningless slaughter, Ethan for the first time explicitly reveals his obsession. Brutally knocking Martin down, he exclaims: "Hunger, empty bellies . . . at least *they* won't feed any Comanch' this winter." Then, at the cavalry fort, the searchers find some mad white women and girls of Debbie's age who had lived among Indians and have now been "liberated" by the army. It is of crucial importance for a correct understanding of the film to realize that their madness is not caused by mistreatment at the hands of "the savages" but rather by the brutality of the cavalry. One of them immediately breaks into a series of horrible screams at the sight of an army sergeant and doctor entering with Ethan and Martin.[30] Nevertheless, Ethan blames the Indians for the girls' fate: "They ain't white—anymore. They're Comanch'." The camera then moves in to a close-up of Ethan's face, and a different kind of madness is clearly written on his features. The extreme rarity of such a camera movement attests to its utmost significance; it reveals Ethan's murderous obsession. The moment is emphasized by the predominant dark colors of this scene, and Ethan's face is partly obscured by shadow.

With the inexorable logic of paranoia, Ethan later attempts to shoot Debbie once he has caught up with her. Ironically, she has come to warn him and Martin against an impending attack by Scar. Martin shields Debbie with his body as Ethan, gun drawn, approaches. But an Indian's arrow, which wounds Ethan in the shoulder, prevents the murder. The impending intrafamilial bloodshed is thus avoided at the last moment. Ford visually emphasizes the nefarious nature of Ethan's attempt on his niece's life when Ethan draws his gun in a sweeping, circular movement; this is

30. This is a point missed in most critical studies of *The Searchers*, which attribute the girls' madness to their experiences among the Indians and then have to explain the fact that Debbie has not been driven mad by her life among these same Indians. A prominent recent example of this view is Douglas Pye, "Double Vision: Miscegenation and Point of View in *The Searchers*," in *The Book of Westerns*, ed. Ian Cameron and Douglas Pye (New York: Continuum, 1996, also published as *The Movie Book of the Western* [London: Studio Vista, 1996]), 229–235. Pye's is a thoughtful and serious essay, but it is wrong on the subject of madness and miscegenation and hence reaches false conclusions. A view similar to Pye's occurs in Slotkin, *Gunfighter Nation*, 468–470. Anyone doubting that the savagery of white rather than Indian society and, related to this, Ethan's racism are the issue of the cavalry sequence should consider that this army is none other than George Armstrong Custer's Seventh Cavalry, clearly identified by the number seven on its pennants and by its well-known tune "Garry Owen" on the soundtrack. On the significance of Max Steiner's musical scoring of the cavalry sequence see William Darby and Jack Du Bois, *American Film Music: Major Composers, Techniques, Trends, 1915–1990* (Jefferson, N. C.: McFarland, 1990), 53–55, especially 53. More important, Ford filmed but then excised from this sequence a scene in which Ethan and Martin meet a swaggering and brutal Custer face to face; see on this Eckstein, "Darkening Ethan," 9–11. In production notes for *The Searchers* Ford described Custer as "inept . . . arrogant . . . a phony . . . a glory-hunter" (quoted from Eckstein, 22 note 46). This view is consistent with Ford's film *Fort Apache* (1948), a thinly disguised story about Custer's incompetence and eventual defeat at the Little Bighorn.

the same manner in which he had earlier shot out the dead Indian's eyes. The identity of the gesture indicates an identical inhumanity underlying both acts and points to the fact that, to Ethan, Debbie is no longer white. His rejection of her is made chillingly explicit in two verbal exchanges he has with Martin in later scenes in the film. In his last will and testament he renounces her as not being his "blood kin" because "she's been living with a buck." More explicitly, before the whites' final attack on Scar, Martin pleads with Ethan and the Rangers not to destroy the entire Indian camp, as they are planning to do. Ethan now admits to him his hope that Debbie will not survive the indiscriminate slaughter and adds: "Living with Comanches ain't being alive." These words and the Rangers' scorched-earth tactics will have reminded viewers at the time of the film's initial release of parallels with recent history.

4. Pity and Fear

Ford reveals Ethan's madness through extreme close-ups of his face. While he usually shows us both the people and the environment in which they act—Ford is well known for his medium-long shots indoors and extreme long shots outdoors, which dwarf the human figures—there are some highly significant moments when the camera and with it the viewer move in for a closer look. The close-ups of Ethan powerfully depict the turmoil inside him. As Béla Balász has emphasized: "Close-ups are often dramatic revelations of what is really happening under the surface of appearances."[31] Ford prepares the viewer for the impact of these close-ups early in the film, when he shows Ethan in a medium shot after he has realized what strategy lies behind the Indians' theft of the white settlers' cattle. Knowing that it is too late to bring help, he allows his horse to rest while the others return in futile haste. To judge from his words and actions during this scene, Ethan is calm and self-controlled, but when we see him more closely, mechanically rubbing down his horse and staring vacantly into the distance, the expression on his face tells us differently: "He is contemplating the unthinkable."[32] Watching Ethan's partly shadowed face,

31. Béla Balász, *Theory of the Film: Character and Growth of a New Art*, tr. Edith Bone (1952; rpt. New York: Ayer, 1997), 56. Cf. Soviet theorist and director Sergei Eisenstein on the function of the close-up: it is "not so much to *show* or to *present* as to *signify*, to *give meaning*, to *designate*"; quoted from Eisenstein, *Film Form: Essays in Film Theory*, tr. and ed. Jay Leyda (1949; rpt. San Diego: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1977), 238.

32. McBride and Wilmington, *John Ford*, 160. Stowell, *John Ford*, 139, characterizes Ethan's expression at this moment as "powerfully tragic."

we can see in our minds exactly what he sees with his mind's eye: the rape and slaughter taking place some forty miles away at his brother's home. Ford forcefully communicates to us Ethan's feelings of helplessness, anxiety, grief, and despair. With this brief shot he makes the filming of the actual carnage unnecessary. At this moment the spectator begins to be drawn irresistibly into the tragedy about to unfold. A full close-up of Ethan then logically occurs when he comes upon the aftermath of the slaughter. When Ethan forcibly restrains Martin from rushing into the shed where the dead bodies of his foster parents have been thrown and when, later, after finding Lucy, he behaves in a manner strange and inexplicable to Martin, the viewers can themselves picture what Ethan has seen and can feel with him. Ethan's discoveries of the bodies of Martha and Lucy are not presented to us in gruesome detail; instead, Ford eschews any trace of luridness by only showing us the effect on Ethan of the emotional shock of these grisly moments. Ford's discreet handling of such instances of high emotional strain, obliquely depicting the results of savage violence against helpless victims, is in a direct line of tradition from Greek tragedy, in which acts of violence took place offstage and were reported by a messenger or eyewitness. On the Greek tragic stage and in artistic cinema, the spectators' task is to fill in the terrifying details themselves; in this way playwright and film director ensure their audience's emotional involvement and call forth their feelings of pity and fear.

These emotions rise in the viewer at several crucial moments in *The Searchers*. At the beginning, we fear for the survival of Ethan's relatives while they are being stalked by an unseen and terrifying enemy; the greater is our shock when we first see Scar, his shadow falling over the crouching figure of little Debbie and his face decorated with war paint. Next we fear for the fate of the two abducted girls and hope that Ethan will find them; later, after we have become aware of Ethan's obsession, we begin to hope that he will *not* find Debbie. More extended scenes of pity and fear in *The Searchers* appear in the cavalry sequence. Ethan and Martin come upon the aftermath of the cavalry's massacre of an entire Indian village, with tepees burning and bloody corpses of humans and animals lying about and left to freeze in the winter cold, a scene of documentary realism.[33] Shortly thereafter, the searchers witness the white

33. The documentary-like realism in this scene becomes evident if we compare it with photographs of the massacre at Wounded Knee; see photos 66–75 in Richard E. Jensen, R. Eli Paul, and John E. Carter, *Eyewitness at Wounded Knee* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1991), 105–114. Eckstein, "Darkening Ethan," 21–22 note 44, adduces George Armstrong Custer's massacre of the Cheyennes at the Washita River in Oklahoma in November 1868. Cf. Slotkin, *Gunfighter Nation*, 467–468 and 737 note 52.

man's "civilizing" influence when they interrogate the mad women. The visual contrast of the cavalry sequence to the rest of the film enhances our sympathy for the victims, particularly women and children. With the exception of the brief scene of dialogue in which Ethan decides to break off the search, the cavalry sequence is the only part of the film taking place in winter; with the same exception, it is also the only sequence of location filming outside Monument Valley. The predominant colors of the cavalry sequence are red (blood shed, fires burning), white (the snow covering the land and the dead like a shroud), and blue (the cavalry uniforms), hardly an accidental scheme. The violence in the cavalry sequence, underscored by its cold colors, which contrast with the warm brown-red of Monument Valley, foreshadows Ethan's coldblooded attempt on his niece's life.

As the preceding comments have already indicated, the tragic quality of *The Searchers* is founded on its natural setting. The landscape, one of the basic aspects of meaning in the western genre, is Monument Valley, the western country par excellence, whose iconography is most closely associated with the cinema of John Ford.[34] The valley's cyclopean rocks form the perfect background to the film's human actions and impart to them an overwhelming sense of doom. Towering cliffs dwarf the protagonists and implacably look down upon the deeds and sufferings of the people living or moving among them. This landscape, in which both whites and Indians are carving out their existence, points to the duality of both races' ways of life, a rudimentary social organization enveloped by savagery. It is not by accident that Ethan is photographed with a sheer wall of rock rising up behind him at the moment he commits his first inhuman act, blinding the dead Indian. This is a side of Ford's filmmaking well-known in Hollywood, as the following words of his fellow western director John Sturges indicate: "He [Ford] used big, big things behind people, and he shot up at them to make them look menacing by taking on the character of the mountains behind that were menacing."[35] In Ford's westerns, Monument Valley does not function as mere pictorialism but rather possesses thematic meaning as his "moral universe."[36] He himself observed about Monument Valley: "the real star of my Westerns has always been the land." Ford also implies moral regeneration arising from the western landscape in an almost cathartic experience: "When I come back from making a Western on location, I feel a better man for it."[37] Thus Ethan's journey into madness takes on an almost unbearable poignancy: a sense of both timelessness and doom permeates *The Searchers*. When Ethan and Martin are pursued by Scar and his warriors, we see them fleeing toward a cave, just as later Debbie, fleeing from Ethan, will run toward a cave of similar appearance. In both instances the camera observes the fugitives from inside. The impression is that of nature implacably watching the acts of men. But nature is not always hostile; the camera placement suggests its readiness to receive, shelter, and protect. Martin, for instance, finds lifesaving water dripping from the barren rock when he and Ethan are secure in the cave. Nature's ambivalence mirrors the ambiguous nature of man.

34. On landscape in the western see Warshow, "The Westerner," 139; Philip French, *Westerns: Aspects of a Movie Genre*, 2nd ed. (London: Secker and Warburg, 1977), 100–113; Cawelti, *The Six-Gun Mystique Sequel*, 23–27; Solomon, *Beyond Formula*, 12–17; and Clive Bush, "Landscape," in *BFI Companion to the Western*, 167–170. In general see Smith, *Virgin Land*. For the literary roots of the meaning of the western landscape see Bush, 169.

35. The quotation is taken from Sturges's audio commentary on the Criterion Collection laserdisc edition of his 1954 film *Bad Day at Black Rock* (Santa Monica, Calif.: Voyager, 1991).

36. French, *Westerns*, 104; on Ford and Monument Valley see also McBride and Wilmington, *John Ford*, 36–37 ("Monument Valley is a moral battleground"), and Jean-Louis Leutrat and Suzanne Liandrat-Guigues, "John Ford and Monument Valley," in *Back in the Saddle Again: New Essays on the Western*, ed. Edward Buscombe and Roberta E. Pearson (London: British Film Institute, 1998), 160–169. The latter discuss the 1925 film *The Vanishing American*, directed by George B. Seitz from a novel by Zane Grey, which was inspired by Grey's travels to Monument Valley and intended to be the companion of a film. Intertitles of this film, which begins and ends with views of Monument Valley, describe it as "a stately valley of great monuments of stone," replete with "the hush of the ages, for men come and live their hour and go away, but the mighty stage remains" (quoted from Leutrat and Liandrat-Guigues, 168). One year before *The Searchers*, the film was remade from a screenplay by LeMay. This version of *The Vanishing American*, directed by Joe Kane, differs from the silent one in that it allows its Indian hero to marry his white sweetheart; in the original version he had been killed off to avoid miscegenation.

37. Bill Libby, "The Old Wrangler Rides Again," *Cosmopolitan* (March 1964), 12–21; quotations at 21 and 14.

38. On *anagnorisis* and peripety see *Poetics*, chapters 10–11 (1452a12–b13).

5. Recognition and Reversal

The effects of classical tragedy are heightened by the complexity of its plot. Aristotle calls those plays complex whose plots contain *anagnorisis* and *peripeteia*. The former term denotes the discovery of someone's identity, while peripety, a reversal of fortune, occurs as a result of actions and sufferings whose implications, unknown before but then revealed through *anagnorisis*, lead to the hero's tragic fall.[38] Both recognition and peripety

represent a passage from ignorance to knowledge and self-awareness and complement the workings of catharsis. Forms of recognition and peripety often recur in the later dramatic tradition and occasionally in the medium of film.

Recognition and reversal occur in two key scenes in *The Searchers*. The former takes place in three separate stages during a council of Ethan, Martin, and Scar in the chief's tent. Scar calls upon one of his wives to show Ethan and Martin some of the scalps he has taken to avenge his sons killed by whites. Ethan recognizes, as he will later tell Martin, one of the scalps to be that of Martin's mother; evidently, Scar has been the white settlers' nemesis for longer than they themselves had realized. This first recognition leads directly to another. Scar now draws attention to the medal he is wearing among other decorations on his chest; Ethan recognizes it as the one he gave as a present to little Debbie upon his return home after the Civil War. This is the first tangible proof for Ethan, besides the circumstantial evidence he has come upon so far, that it is indeed Scar who has kidnapped Debbie. A rapid tracking shot underscores the importance of the moment, the camera moving in to a close-up of the medal from Ethan's point of view. This particular piece of camera work serves a double purpose. It closely links Ethan and Scar and also prepares Ethan and the viewer for their first glimpse of Debbie after her kidnapping. Ethan and Martin now look up simultaneously at Scar's young wife holding the scalps in front of them; both immediately recognize Debbie in her. Their long and arduous search has finally come to an end, although they are at the moment powerless to take her away from Scar.

Peripety is linked to catharsis in what must be the most gripping and emotionally draining sequence in the entire film. Before the Rangers' and Ethan's final attack on Scar's village, Martin has crept into Scar's tepee to save Debbie from the indiscriminate slaughter that is imminent. Surprised by Scar, Martin shoots and kills him. After the Rangers' massacre of the village, Ethan, bent on murder and revenge, finds the chief dead in his tent. Ford denies Ethan the western hero's most basic exploit, the showdown with his enemy. Scar's death is intentionally anticlimactic, a deliberate revision of the traditional code of combat which goes back to the duel of Achilles and Hector in the *Iliad*. Ethan, denied heroic stature, now defiles a corpse for the second time: he scalps Scar. While Ford does not show the actual scalping on the screen, he cuts away only at the last possible moment, thereby emphasizing both its terror and its significance. Although probably introduced by whites, the custom of scalping is associated almost exclusively with the Indians as a symbol of their savagery. According to this convention, a white man, unless presented as wholly dehumanized, would not commit such an act. Ethan's deed represents the moral nadir down to which his obsession has brought him. This is the moment of his greatest self-abasement as a human. Ford emphasizes Ethan's savagery when he shows him riding out of Scar's tent, holding the dripping scalp in his hand. Ethan appears like a gruesome angel of death, and Ford gives us another close-up of his face. Once outside the tepee, Ethan sees Debbie, who turns and flees in terror, pursued by her uncle.

The viewer's emotions of pity and fear begin to reach their peak at this moment, enhanced by the fact that Martin, who had saved Debbie's life once before, now is helpless in the face of Ethan's frenzy. When Martin tries to stop him, Ethan simply knocks him down. Ethan finally catches up with Debbie at the entrance to a cave. The exhausted girl, fallen to the ground, recoils in horror from her pursuer, who has dismounted and is approaching. But now a surprising reversal of the girl's—and the viewer's—expectations occurs. Instead of killing her, Ethan picks her up in his arms, just as he had done on first seeing her after his return home, and takes her back to white society. The explanation for this dramatic peripety must be that all the hatred, violence, and obsession, accumulated in Ethan during the years spent in pursuit of Scar and Debbie, have drained from him after his meanest act, the scalping of Scar. The brief period of time elapsed between his knocking down Martin and catching up with Debbie has brought Ethan back to his senses. Finally acknowledging the ties of blood kinship he has denied for so long, Ethan is at last saved from what seemed up to now an inevitable fall into savagery and inhumanity. The draining of violence from Ethan parallels the viewer's cathartic experience. The scene just described is the best proof for the film's tragic nature.[39]

6. Changes of Mind

Ethan's change of mind has elicited much negative comment from critics for being too abrupt. Although Ford intended it to come as a surprise, it is neither merely a coup de théâtre nor a cheap means to ensure a happy

39. Sarris, *The John Ford Movie Mystery*, 173: "a man picks up a girl in his arms and is miraculously delivered of all the racist, revenge-seeking furies that have seared his soul." Cf. Lattimore, *Story Patterns in Greek Tragedy*, 8, on *anagnorisis* and peripety: "And this is the moment of truth or revelation or recognition when the hero in drama sees the shape of the action in which he is involved." As Ford himself has said about the protagonists of his films: "the tragic moment . . . permits them to define themselves, to become conscious of what they are. . . . to exalt man 'in depth,' this is the dramatic device I like"; quoted from Gallagher, *John Ford*, 302, from an interview with Jean Mitry, first published in French in *Cahiers du Cinéma*, 45 (March 1955), 6.

ending for a mainstream Hollywood genre film ("John Wayne would never shoot a girl!"). Rather, Debbie's earlier change of mind about the Indians with whom she has been living sets the stage for Ethan's. Warning Martin against Scar, Debbie urged him to "go away" and leave her with the Comanches: "These are my people." But when Martin wakes her up in Scar's tepee to save her from the Rangers' attack, she immediately consents. Her change of mind, likewise surprising, has likewise been criticized as a major dramatic weakness.[40]

Such charges, however, lose conviction if we place the two moments concerned into the tradition of Greek and specifically Euripidean tragedy. The one play that has received the most extensive criticism since antiquity is Euripides' *Iphigenia in Aulis*. Its heroine first pleads with her father for her life, then suddenly accepts and even seeks out her sacrificial death.[41] Nor is hers the only abrupt change in the play. Earlier, her uncle Menelaus had unexpectedly changed his mind about her death, and her father Agamemnon had changed his more than once. If we adduce another famous instance of a change of mind from Shakespearean drama, Prince Hal's rejection of his old friend Falstaff after Hal has been crowned king—"I know thee not, old man" (*2 Henry IV*, act 5, scene 5), a denial that leads to Falstaff's death—then we see that Ford kept well within the bounds of the dramatic tradition.

While there exist obvious thematic differences between Euripides' play and Ford's film, and while it is clear that Ford was not consciously imitating Euripides, the theme of intrafamilial murder and changes of mind occurring in connection with such an act are present in both works and may be considered together, notwithstanding the fact that Iphigenia is a much

40. For example, Pye, "Double Vision," 235. Cf. Gallagher, *John Ford*, 335–336 (note). Eckstein, "Darkening Ethan," 14, adduces the film's screenplay to explain the change.

41. Aristotle, *Poetics* 15.5 (1454a32–33): "the girl who beseeches bears no resemblance to the later girl" (quoted from Halliwell, *The* Poetics *of Aristotle*, 48); H. D. F. Kitto, *Greek Tragedy: A Literary Study*, 3rd ed. (1961; rpt. London: Routledge, 1990), 362: "a thoroughly second-rate play [whose] whole idea was second-rate"—an extreme and untenable verdict. A modern defense of Aristotle's charge of inconsistency in Iphigenia's character is Hermann Funke, "Aristoteles zu Euripides' Iphigeneia in Aulis," *Hermes*, 92 (1964), 284–299; against his view see especially Albin Lesky, *Die tragische Dichtung der Hellenen*, 3rd ed. (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, 1972), 483–484; Herbert Siegel, "Self-Delusion and the *Volte-Face* of Iphigenia in Euripides' 'Iphigenia at Aulis'," *Hermes*, 108 (1980), 300–321; and Heinz Neitzel, "Iphigeniens Opfertod: Betrachtungen zur 'Iphigenie in Aulis' von Euripides," *Würzburger Jahrbücher für die Altertumswissenschaft*, 6 (1980), 61–70. The most extensive recent discussion of the play is John Gibert, *Change of Mind in Greek Tragedy* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, 1995), 202–254. On Iphigenia's character and her sacrifice see further Walter Stockert, *Euripides, Iphigenie in Aulis*, vol. 1: *Einleitung und Text* (Vienna: Verlag der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1992), 26–37 and 59–61.

more prominent character in her story than Debbie is in hers. In the *Iphigenia in Aulis* we have a situation of father–daughter killing, in which both change their minds; in *The Searchers* it is that of an uncle–niece killing, in which both also change their minds. The definition of such changes of mind given by Bernard Knox in regard to Greek tragedy—"the dramatic presentation and formulation of a new decision or attitude which supplants and reverses a previously determined course of action"—applies equally to Ford's film.[42]

Some additional parallels may help obviate critics' concerns about *The Searchers*. As Menelaus' change of mind prepares us for Iphigenia's, so Debbie's prepares us for Ethan's. All four "arise from the intrinsic structure of events," to quote Aristotle.[43] Both Iphigenia's and Debbie's changes of mind are instances of spontaneous action in highly dramatic circumstances that do not allow for any deliberation.[44] The same is true for Ethan's change of mind. Swiftness of action in crucial scenes makes important reversals more easily acceptable to audiences than they would be otherwise. An extreme example of no less than four changes of mind within twenty lines occurs in Euripides, when Medea is torn between killing and saving her children (*Medea* 1043–1063). The pressure under which dramatic characters act is made palpable to the sympathetic spectator, and their surprising changes of mind are important for the effect of tragic catharsis on the viewer.[45] As regards *The Searchers*, Debbie has been living for years surrounded by threats of imminent death, both as a member of an Indian war party constantly campaigning and as a target of the whites' pursuit. Her acceptance of Martin and its concomitant rejection of the Indians is an instance of that sudden eruption of the elemental will to live that is fundamental to every living being in situations of mortal danger; the same instinct had prompted Iphigenia to plead with Agamemnon for her life.[46] As Bruno Snell observed about the Greeks in

42. Bernard Knox, "Second Thoughts in Greek Tragedy," in *Word and Action: Essays on the Ancient Theater* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1979), 231–249; rpt. from *Greek, Roman and Byzantine Studies*, 7 no. 3 (1966); quotation from 246 note 1. On this article see Gibert, *Change of Mind in Greek Tragedy*, 255–262.

43. Aristotle, *Poetics* 14.1 (1453b2), in the context of *eleos* and *phobos*; quoted from Halliwell, *The* Poetics *of Aristotle*, 45. Cf. David Sansone, "Iphigeneia Changes Her Mind," *Illinois Classical Studies*, 16 (1991), 161–172, especially 168–169. Knox, "Second Thoughts," 243–244: "Iphigenia's change of mind has been well prepared for in Euripides' play—it comes as the climax of a series of swift and sudden changes of decision which is unparalleled in ancient drama."

44. Cf. Neitzel, "Iphigeniens Opfertod," 69–70.

45. So (all too briefly) Stockert, *Euripides, Iphigenie in Aulis*, 60.

46. Here I follow Funke, "Aristoteles zu Euripides' Iphigeneia in Aulis," 298: "der Ausbruch elementaren Lebenswillens, der natürlichsten Anlage in jedem Lebewesen."

general: "The tragic arose from an awareness of the necessity of making decisions and reached its full development as the decisions engendered a growing sense of urgency and perplexity"—to which we could add: a sense of urgency and perplexity present not only in the dramatic character but also in the spectator.[47] How else could audiences get emotionally involved, either then or now?

In connection with Euripides' *Hippolytus*, Albin Lesky concluded that changes in character are always abrupt in this author's plays and occur without any intermediate stages but are nevertheless well motivated psychologically.[48] The same is true for *The Searchers*. Repeated emphasis on the blood relation between Debbie and Ethan made his change of mind understandable, as we have seen; equally, the close ties between Debbie and Martin, which were formed during her infancy and his childhood, for them fulfill the function of blood kinship. This becomes evident from their dialogue when they first meet outside Scar's camp. Martin, unsure if she will recognize him, tries to jog her memory: "Debbie, don't you remember? I'm Martin, Martin your brother. Remember?—Debbie, remember back." And she *has* recognized him: "I remember—from always." Her simple words speak volumes.

Snell noted about Agamemnon and Menelaus in *Iphigenia* that their "sudden exchange of roles reveals Euripides' deft and ingenious grasp of what was dramatically effective." Again, true for Ford as well. Nevertheless, in *Iphigenia* "the course of events is intelligible within the context of the play itself, but from an external perspective much of it must seem rather odd."[49] Almost the same has been said about *The Searchers*. But even if not everything in its plot develops as smoothly as fastidious critics demand, a comparison with Euripides—and, for that matter, with Shakespeare or others—reveals that great artists are not always out for perfection and that its absence need not seriously impair or invalidate their work. Ford said during the filming of *Cheyenne Autumn* (1964), his last western: "I don't *want* it to look perfect."[50] *The Searchers* also does not always look perfect, and we see its characters as humans are, not as they should be. This, too, conforms to Aristotelian precepts in the *Poetics*. Aristotle also quotes a saying, attributed to Sophocles, that Sophocles painted people as they ought to be but that Euripides painted them as they are.[51]

47. Bruno Snell, "From Tragedy to Philosophy: *Iphigenia in Aulis*," in *Greek Tragedy: Modern Essays in Criticism*, ed. Erich Segal (New York: Harper and Row, 1983, also published as *Oxford Readings in Greek Tragedy* [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983]), 396–405; quotation at 396. This is a slightly abridged English version of "Euripides' aulische Iphigenie," in *Aischylos und das Handeln im Drama* (Leipzig: Dieterich, 1928 [Philologus Supplementband 20 no. 1]), 148–160. Snell, 399, also speaks of Iphigenia's "uncertainty of inexperience," another point of comparison with Debbie.

48. Lesky, *Die tragische Dichtung der Hellenen*, 317 (on the nurse).

49. Snell, "From Tragedy to Philosophy," 398 and 399.

50. Quoted from Bogdanovich, *John Ford*, 8.

7. The Ending of the Film

That Ford eschews a violent climax—such as Ethan killing Debbie and later paying with his own life for this—might at first speak against the tragic quality of the film. But "happy endings" are an important part of the tradition of ancient tragedy. All three Athenian dramatists wrote plays in which murder and bloodshed were avoided. In the *Eumenides*, the conclusion of Aeschylus' *Oresteia*, the Furies are placated and Orestes is absolved from the blood guilt of killing his mother; the eponymous hero of Sophocles' *Philoctetes* forbears from killing his archenemy Odysseus and agrees to help the Greeks before Troy; in Euripides' *Iphigenia among the Taurians*, Orestes is saved from immolation upon the altar of Artemis at the hands of his sister, the goddess's priestess; Euripides' lost play *Antigone* ended with the wedding of Haemon and Antigone, who does not die as she does in Sophocles' *Antigone*; Euripides' *Ion* and *Helen* end happily as well. In chapter 14 of the *Poetics*, Aristotle even prefers an avoidance of intrafamilial killing.[52] For the protagonist of the western film, we have Robert Warshow's observation that "his story need not end with his death (and usually does not)."[53]

Even so, Ford avoids any superficial dénouement. Debbie is restored to civilization when Ethan takes her to the Jorgensens, who will, presumably, keep her as a member of their family. But Ethan himself remains an outcast from society, homeless and alone. In the film's famous last scene, after everybody else has gone inside, Ethan is left behind on the doorstep. His look follows the others; he then turns away and slowly begins to walk back into the desert wilderness while the door closes upon him. Thematically, and cinematically, through its camera setup, this parallels the film's opening scene, providing a perfect example of ring composition and emphasizing the Aristotelian unities of time, place, and action. In addition, the ending summarizes the protagonist's state of mind: Ethan,

51. Aristotle, *Poetics*, chapter 25, especially 25.6 (1460b33–36).

52. On this aspect of Greek tragedy see also Lattimore, *Story Patterns in Greek Tragedy*, 13 and 76–77 note 39.

53. Warshow, "The Westerner," 143.

drained of emotions and beyond violence, resigns himself to the status of an outcast and loner. While Ethan is not punished by death, his survival hardly constitutes a complete redemption. In a reversal of the case of Oedipus, who is guilty in deed but innocent in intention, Ethan has been guilty in intention—that of killing his niece—and innocent of the deed, but he is by no means absolved from guilt, as his status of social outcast attests. And just as Oedipus exiled himself from Thebes, Ethan takes upon himself a voluntary exile to the wilderness. Vernant's comments on Sophocles' *Oedipus the King* emphasize the duality inherent in the tragic protagonist thus exiled: "the tragedy is based on the idea that the same man . . . on whom the prosperity of the earth, of the herds, and of the women depends . . . is at the same time considered to be something dreadfully dangerous, a sort of incarnation of *hubris*, which must be expelled."[54] The task of finding his niece accomplished, Ethan has become superfluous to a society that, from now on, will live in peace, no longer threatened by Indian raids and no longer needing the archaic man of violence for its protection. When Ethan hugs his right arm with his left hand before turning away, this gesture indicates both his loneliness and the fact that he has outlived his usefulness to society. It attests to Ford's mastery that these last moments in the film are completely wordless (except for the title song returning on the soundtrack). Nobody explains anything; the implications are nevertheless overwhelmingly clear. The subtlety of this closure to the film even surpasses that in the scene where Ford revealed Martha's love for Ethan. Ethan now receives the reward for his sacrilegious obsession; as critics have observed, he, too, will "wander forever between the winds," refused entry into the land of home and family, peace and civilization.[55] Like a new Ahasver, he is condemned to roam restlessly and aimlessly. In this context the names of the Edwards brothers, Ethan and Aaron, take on added meaning through their biblical connotations: Aaron is the brother of Moses, the wanderer in the desert who may not enter the Promised Land. It is worth noting that the two names are changed from those the brothers carried in LeMay's novel. Both

54. Vernant, "Greek Tragedy: Problems of Interpretation," in *The Languages of Criticism and the Sciences of Man*, ed. Richard Macksey and Eugenio Donato (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1970), 273–295; quotation at 277. Jaan Puhvel, *Comparative Mythology* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1987; rpt. 1989), 242, makes a similar point about the Indo-European tradition of heroic myth: "The warrior . . . had an ambivalent role as single champion or part of a self-centered corps or coterie, both a society's external defender and its potential internal menace."

55. Thus McBride and Wilmington, *John Ford*, 163. On the filming of the ending see Carey, *Company of Heroes*, 173–174.

Ethan and his alter ego Scar represent necessary steps in the historical evolution of the country from savagery to civilization. They must live violent lives to prepare the way for future peace and justice, but they themselves have no part in this. It is the westerner's task to aid in the transformation of nature from cruel and barren wilderness to a blossoming garden made fertile and tended by man, but he is not meant to participate in the result.[56] In *The Searchers*, the movement from violence to order is represented primarily in the figure of Ethan; his tragedy lies in the fact that he helps bring about this development but, belonging only to the archaic side, is himself unable to make the transition. When he tells Debbie, "Let's go home," he can take her home and hand her over to others, but he cannot go home himself. Ethan, like other Fordian heroes, takes up "with resignation his burden as scapegoat and saviour. These transitional figures accept the stigma of all heroes since the beginning of society, and their characters often have mythical or Biblical overtones."[57] Our emotional involvement in the visual poetry of the film's final moments derives from our awareness of this; the ending also bears out Warshow's observation that we primarily respond to the hero's defeat. The theme of violence and disorder giving way to culture, law, and a stable society is perhaps the most fundamental subject in the history of Western literature. Among its earliest ancient examples is the *Theogony*, Hesiod's epic on the creation of the world and the gods, in which the movement from *chaos* to *kosmos*, from disorder to the order of the universe as ruled by divine justice, is embodied in the myth of the three generations of gods who successively rule over the world. The motif of the heroic journey or quest and that of savage wilderness changing to a civilization ordered by law are fundamental to Western culture and myth.[58]

56. On this pervasive theme in American intellectual history see Smith, *Virgin Land*, 121–260, especially 123–132 and 250–260, the latter passage on Frederick Jackson Turner's 1893 frontier hypothesis ("The Significance of the Frontier in American History"). In this landmark essay Turner called the frontier "the meeting point between savagery and civilization." Its strongest restatements in the cinema of John Ford occur in *The Searchers* and in *The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance* (1962). On the connections between these two films and Ford's *My Darling Clementine* (1946) see Peter Wollen, *Signs and Meaning in the Cinema*, 4th ed. (London: British Film Institute, 1998), 66–70.

57. Baxter, *The Cinema of John Ford*, 21. (Appropriately, when he first sees Ethan after his return from the war, Clayton calls him "the prodigal brother.") In antiquity the hero's acceptance of his burden finds its most moving expression in Virgil's description of Aeneas taking up his shield (*Aeneid* 8.729–731); in his discussion of these lines Jasper Griffin, *Virgil* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), 67, speaks of "the pathos of the pioneer who must work for a result which he will never see."

58. Cf. Northrop Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism: Four Essays* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1957; rpt. 1990), 186–206, especially 192–195.

8. Choric Commentators

One of the most distinctive features of Greek drama is the chorus. Far from being a mere adornment to the action of the play, choral songs form an integral part of both tragedy and comedy; indeed, as far as we know, Greek drama may have developed from originally static choral recitations. The tragic chorus finds its chief function in commenting on the protagonist's words and deeds. Voicing the author's thoughts and opinions, the chorus provides an important link to the audience. Its integration into the plot can range from detached observation to active participation. While in the history of theater the chorus has not preserved its importance beyond the ancient stage, traces of its function are still to be found in later developments of tragedy. Shakespearean drama with its fools and clowns immediately comes to mind. Continuing this tradition, comment on the action in the cinema is frequently assigned not to a group of observers but to one or more individual characters often closely associated with the hero. In artistically meaningful films, a character's comments on the protagonist's deeds or attitudes may provide as close a bond to the audience as did the chorus on the classical stage. Not surprisingly, characters of a choric nature also appear in *The Searchers*.

One of these is old Mose Harper, a divine fool in an almost Shakespearean sense, reminiscent of the fool in *King Lear*.[59] Mose does not play a major part in the film, being on screen for only a comparatively short time; nevertheless, he is present during some of the film's key scenes. Mose is one of Ford's most memorable creations, providing the richness of detail and characterization unique to the characters who people his best films. In this way, even marginal figures may become essential. Mose is important on different levels. For one, he provides comic relief from the film's stark tragedy.[60] Under a less accomplished director than Ford, these comic

59. Cf. Baxter, *The Cinema of John Ford*, 19.

60. Evidence of Ford's narrative mastery in this film is his seamless integration of two comic subplots into the main tragic plot. This, too, is in keeping with Greek tragedy, which could contain comic elements; see Bernd Seidensticker, *Palintonos Harmonia: Studien zu komischen Elementen in der griechischen Tragödie* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, 1982). While humor is present even in its serious moments, the film in its second half switches back and forth between tragedy and comedy with effortless grace. As Ford said before beginning work on *The Searchers*: "I should like to do a tragedy, the most serious in the world, that turned into the ridiculous"; quoted from Michael Goodwin, "John Ford: A Poet Who Shot Great Movies," *Moving Image*, 1 no. 3 (December 1981), 59–63; quotation at 62. See also Andrew Sinclair, *John Ford* (New York: Dial Press/Wade, 1979), 213–214, on Ford's interest in tragedy and on his place in the history of tragedy as a popular art form, and cf. Solomon, *Beyond Formula*, 46. The two comic strands in the film involve Martin's inadvertent acquisition of an Indian girl as a bride; this reverts to

touches could easily destroy the film's dramatic equilibrium; as it is, the viewer's apprehension of impending tragedy even increases. More important, Mose is also an experienced westerner. He immediately grasps the reason why Ethan blinds the dead Indian, and on two occasions he gives Ethan decisive information about Debbie after Ethan has lost all traces of her. For this, Mose endures great physical exhaustion. The bald and emaciated old man ends as a figure of pity and woe. Ford uses Christian imagery to emphasize his long suffering when, toward the end of the film, Mose is supported by a soldier on either side of him, his arms outstretched in a Christlike pose. In contrast to the greed of Futterman, the corrupt trader who sold Ethan information about Debbie, Mose has no desire for material rewards: "Don't want no money . . . just a roof over old Mose's head, and a rocking chair by the fire." His awareness of old age and encroaching death and his selfless loyalty endow him with quiet dignity. It is fitting that the old man will find a permanent home with the Jorgensens. Mose, as his name implies, has been a homeless wanderer for most of his life; in this he, too, is an alter ego of Ethan. This is reinforced by the slight touches of childishness and harmless madness in Mose, of which he is himself aware. But since he is a gentle and innocent soul, his end will be different from Ethan's.

More directly than Mose Harper, the figure of Mrs. Jorgensen serves as a choric commentator. Not only is she the archetypal hardy pioneer woman, but she also embodies pragmatism and common sense in the face of the men's more emotional and irrational reactions to the tragic events in their lives. She is an example of what Ford described as "the home women who helped break the land, bear and raise children and make a home for their families. These were hard times for women and they acquitted themselves nobly."[61] After the Edwards family's funeral, Mrs. Jorgensen's is the voice of restraint, which counsels against meaningless and ruinous revenge. She implores Ethan to refrain from drawing

stark tragedy when Ethan later finds her killed by the cavalry. In the courtship of Laurie Jorgensen by Charlie McCorry, an archetypal redneck, and in his subsequent brawl over Laurie with Martin, the comedy in the film comes close to farce. Cf. McBride and Wilmington, *John Ford*, 32: "In [Ford's] greatest works, the plot line oscillates freely between the tragic and the ridiculous, with the comic elements providing a continuous commentary on the meaning of the drama." As Sarris, *The John Ford Movie Mystery*, 174, has noted on the humor in *The Searchers*: "If Ford had been more solemn, *The Searchers* would have been less sublime." There is even a fair share of ridicule of the military in the film. Whereas the army had been characterized as indiscriminate butchers of Indians in the cavalry sequence, its second appearance—indeed, interference—at the film's close gives Ford occasion to satirize it for nepotism, bureaucracy, and incompetence.

61. Libby, "The Old Wrangler Rides Again," 17.

Martin and her son Brad into a useless crusade against the Indians: "If the girls are dead, don't let the boys waste their lives in vengeance—promise me, Ethan!" She receives no reply. As usual, the voice of reason goes unheeded, and Mrs. Jorgensen's urgent plea foreshadows her son's death: When he learns about Lucy's fate, Brad impulsively rushes off to the Indian camp to avenge her but falls into Scar's trap. When we next see his mother again, more than a year later in narrative time, she has come to terms with her son's fate, with the harshness of the settlers' existence, and with the hostility of the land in which the pioneers are struggling to survive. In one of the film's key scenes—this is after Ethan and Martin's temporary return from their search—Mr. Jorgensen submits to his grief over Brad's death: "Oh, Ethan, this country . . . it's this country killed my boy." His quiet despair contrasts with his wife's stoic acceptance of her son's death. She characterizes the pioneers' life on the edge of civilization as being "way out on a limb, this year and next, maybe for a hundred more, but I don't think it'll be forever. Someday this country is gonna be a fine, good place to be. Maybe it needs our bones in the ground before that time can come." Her awareness of the necessity for sacrifices gives her the strength to endure. Savagery and violence will eventually be overcome, and there is hope for peace in the future. Her words perfectly summarize the underlying theme of *The Searchers* and of most of Ford's other westerns: the evolution from savagery to civilization, the change in the land from wilderness to garden. Her words point to her own generation's part in this process and to the knowledge that she and the other settlers will not live to see the task completed. They also foreshadow Ethan's eventual fate. Significantly, the setting of this short scene, memorable for its peace and quiet, is the Jorgensens' porch at evening. In a touch typical for his reversals from seriousness to humor or vice versa, Ford circumvents melodramatic emotionalism at this point by having Mr. Jorgensen explain to Ethan his wife's surprising eloquence: "She was a school teacher, you know."

The Jorgensens' is the kind of home which Ethan can visit for a time but to which he cannot belong. Affirmation of hope for the future contrasts with the increasing disappointment of this hope that characterizes the later films of John Ford.[62] *The Searchers* thus takes on added significance if considered in the context of Ford's entire body of work. But even when examined on its own terms, the film represents his foremost achievement. In no small degree this is due to the fact that Ford makes powerful use of mythic and dramatic archetypes and successfully translates them into a modern medium. In his questions quoted at the beginning of this discussion, Vernant emphasizes the ambiguities inherent in the tragic hero and his environs. Ethan is a modern example of such a tragic *deinos*. Ford once described *The Searchers* as "the tragedy of a loner."[63] Although he used the term loosely, his remark came far closer to the film's true nature than he himself may have realized.

62. On this see, for example, Robin Wood, "Shall We Gather at the River? The Late Films of John Ford," *Film Comment*, 7 no. 3 (1971), 8–17; rpt. in *Theories of Authorship: A Reader*, ed. John Caughie (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1981; rpt. 1988), 83–101.

63. Quoted from Bogdanovich, *John Ford*, 92.

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