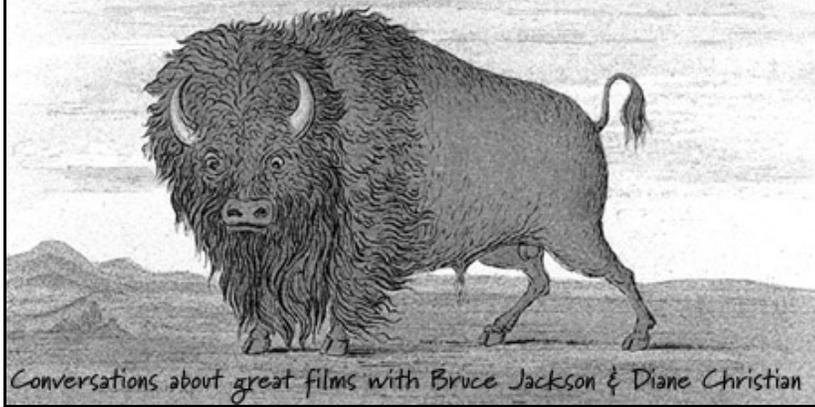


The Buffalo Film Seminars



BADLANDS(1973) 95 min

Martin Sheen...Kit
Carruthers
Sissy Spacek...Holly
Sargis
Warren Oates...Holly's
Father
Ramon Bieri...Cato
Alan Vint...Deputy
Gary Littlejohn...Sheriff
John Carter...Rich man
Bryan Montgomery...Boy
Gail Threlkeld...Girl
Charles Fitzpatrick...Clerk
Howard Ragsdale...Boss
John Womack
Jr....Trooper
Dona Baldwin...Maid
Ben Bravo...Gas station
attendant
Terrence Malick...Man at
rich man's door

Directed, produced and
written by Terrence
Malick
Original Music by Gunild
Keetman, James Taylor,
George Aliceson Tipton
Non-Original Music by
Carl Orff (from
"Schulwerk") and Erik
Satie (from "Trois pièces
en forme")
Cinematography by Tak
Fujimoto, Stevan Lerner
and Brian Probyn
Film Editing by Robert
Estrin

National Film Preservation
Board, USA 1993
National Film Registry

TERRENCE MALICK (30 November 1943, Waco, Texas) has directed five films: *The New World* filming now, *The Thin Red Line* 1998, *Days of Heaven* 1978, *Badlands* 1973 and *Lanton Mills* 1969. He studied philosophy at Harvard and attended Oxford as a Rhodes Scholar but never finished his thesis, which was on Heidegger. For 15 years after *Days of Heaven* he taught in France.

TAK FUJIMOTO has shot 52 films. *Days of Heaven* was his first feature. Some of the others are (asterisks indicate his 12 films for Jonathan Demme): *The Manchurian Candidate* 2004*, *The Truth About Charlie* 2002, *The Sixth Sense* 1999, *Beloved* 1998,* *A Thousand Acres* 1997, *Devil in a Blue Dress* 1995, *The Complex Sessions* 1994*, *Philadelphia* 1993,* *Gladiator* 1992, *The Silence of the Lambs* 1991,* *Married to the Mob* 1988,* *Ferris Bueller's Day Off* 1986, *Pretty in Pink* 1986, *Swing Shift* 1984*, *Melvin and Howard* 1980,* *Where the Buffalo Roam* 1980, *The Last Embrace* 1979, *Something Wild* 1976, and *Caged Heat* 1974*.

MARTIN SHEEN (Martin Estevez, 3 August 1940, Dayton, Ohio) has acted in 153 films and television programs and television series. He is probably best known for his role as Willard in *Apocalypse Now* 1979 and as President Josiah 'Jed' Bartlet in the award-winning tv series "The West Wing." Some of his other films are *Dillinger and Capone* 1995, *Wall Street* 1987, *In the King of Prussia* 1982, *Gandhi* 1982, "The Missiles of October" 1974, "The Execution of Private Slovik" 1974, "Catholics" 1973 and *Catch-22* 1970. Sheen has been arrested over 70 for various liberal political protests. He took the name "Sheen" because of his admiration for Rev. Fulton J. Sheen. His son Charlie kept that name; his son Emilio went back to the family name, Estevez.

SISSY SPACEK (25 December 1949, Quitman, Texas) has acted in 44 films and numerous television programs. She won a best actress Oscar for *Coal Miner's Daughter* 1980. She was nominated for five others: *In the Bedroom* 2001, *Crimes of the Heart* 1986, *The River* 1984, *Missing* 1982, and *Carrie* 1976. Some of the others were *JFK* 1991, *Raggedy Man* 1971, *Heart Beat* 1980, *3 Women* 1977 and *Prime Cut* 1972.

WARREN OATES (5 July 1928, Depoy, Kentucky—3 April 1982, Los Angeles, heart attack) appeared in 59 theatrical and made-for-tv films, as well as hundreds of roles in such tv series as "Gunsmoke," "Police Story," "The Big Valley," "The Virginian," "Rawhide," "Lost in Space," "The Fugitive," "Twilight Zone," and "77 Sunset Strip." His IMDB bio: "American character actor of the 1960s and 1970s whose distinctive style and intensity brought him to offbeat leading roles. Oates was born in a very small Kentucky town and attended high school in Louisville, continuing on to the University of Louisville and military service with the U.S. Marines. In college he became interested in the theatre and in 1954 headed for New York to make his mark as an actor. However, his first real job in television was, as it had been for

November 9, 2004 (IX:13)

He was 25 years old • He combed his hair like James Dean • He was very fastidious • People who lettered bothered him • She was 15 • She took music lessons and could twirl a baton • She wasn't very popular at school • For awhile they lived together in a tree house.

In 1959, she watched while he killed a lot of people.



Badlands

Produced by Bruce Jackson and Diane Christian
Directed by Terrence Malick
Starring Martin Sheen, Sissy Spacek
Carruthers, John Womack, Jr., Gary Littlejohn, John Carter, Bryan Montgomery, Gail Threlkeld, Charles Fitzpatrick, Howard Ragsdale, John Womack, Jr., Dona Baldwin, Ben Bravo

James Dean before him, testing the contest gags on the game show "Beat the Clock" (1950). He did numerous menial jobs while auditioning, including serving as the hat-check man at the nightclub "21". By 1957 he had begun appearing in live dramas such as "Studio One" (1948), but Oates' rural drawl seemed more fitted for the Westerns that were proliferating on the big screen at the time, so he moved to Hollywood and immediately started getting steady work as an increasingly prominent supporting player, often as either craven or vicious types. With his role as one of the Hammond brothers in the Sam Peckinpah masterpiece *Ride the High Country* (1962), Oates found a niche both as an actor and as a colleague of one of the most distinguished and distinctive directors of the period. Peckinpah used Oates repeatedly, and Oates, in large part due to the prominence given him by Peckinpah, became one of those rare character actors whose name and face is as familiar as those of many leading stars. He began to play roles which, while still character parts, were also leads, particularly in cult hits like *Two-Lane Blacktop* (1971) and *Bring Me the Head of Alfredo Garcia* (1974). Although never destined to be a traditional leading man, Oates remained one of Hollywood's most valued character players up until his sudden death from a heart attack at the age of 53. His final two films, *Tough Enough* (1983) and *Blue Thunder* (1983) were dedicated to his memory." Some of his other films were *The Border* 1982, *China 9, Liberty 37* 1978, *The Brink's Job* 1978, *92 in the Shade* 1975, *The White Dawn* 1974, *Dillinger* 1973, *The Hired Hand* 1971, *The Wild Bunch* 1969, *The Shooting* 1967, *In the Heat of the Night* 1967, *Welcome to Hard Times* 1967, *Return of the Seven* 1966, *Major Dundee* 1965, *Ride the High Country* 1962, and *The Rise and Fall of Legs Diamond* 1960.

from World Film Directors Vol II 1945-1985. Ed. John Wakeman, H.W. Wilson co, NY, 1988.

Born Waco, son of an oil company executive, raised in Austin and Bartlesville Oklahoma.

"During his teens he spent more than one summer working on farms, following the grain harvest north to Canada—experience that he later used in *Days of Heaven*. On graduating from Harvard, where he majored in philosophy, Malick went as a Rhodes scholar to Magdalen College, Oxford, but left without completing his thesis—his chosen topic having proved unacceptable to his tutor, Gilbert Ryle. Back in the States, he took up journalism, writing articles for *Life*, *Newsweek*, and the *New Yorker*, which sent him to Bolivia to cover the trial of Régis Debray."

"In 1968 he was appointed to a lectureship in philosophy at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, but stayed only a year. "I was not a good teacher; I didn't have the sort of edge one should have on the students, so I decided to do something else." A course in filmmaking being taught by a colleague aroused Malick's interest. "I'd always liked movies in a kind of naive way. They seemed no less improbable a career than anything else." In the fall of 1969 he enrolled in the newly opened American Film Institute's Center For Advanced Studies in Beverly Hills, as a member of its first class of Fellows. While at the AFI—"a marvelous place"—he began scriptwriting to help finance his studies. "My wife was going to law school and I was working for a time as a rewrite man—two days on *Drive, He Said*, five weeks on . . . *Dirty Harry* at a time when Brando was going to do it. . . . Then we all got fired by Warners."

During his second year at AFI Malick began scripting his first feature film as director. Having already developed a healthy distrust of the big studios, he opted to go for an independent production, financed by a system common on Broadway but rare in the movie business: a limited partnership agreement with a large number of small investors, each putting up anything from \$1,000 to \$50,000. With no completion guarantee, no distribution guarantee, and a non-union crew, Malick began filming—entirely on location—in the summer of 1972, completing the picture late the following year. His final cost was \$335,000, "plus plenty of deferments."

Badlands (1973), though, shows little trace of low-budget roughness, nor of first-movie uncertainty. The film is cool, coherent, and utterly assured" "Rarely has a first film given such an impression of perfect mastery," wrote Michel Sineux in *Positif*, an opinion echoed by most other reviewers. "Compositions, actors, and lines," observed Jonathan Rosenbaum in *Monthly Film Bulletin*, "interlock and click into place with irreducible economy and unerring precision, carrying us along before we have time to catch our breaths."

Broadly derived from the Starkweather-Fugate killings of

the late 1950s, the plot traces the homicidal career of Kit Carruthers, a twenty-five-year-old garbage collector, and his fifteen-year-old girlfriend, Holly Sargis. Their trajectory starts in a small South Dakota town where Kit meets Holly, initiates her into sex and shoots her disapproving father (Warren Oates). The pair then take off northward, heading in theory for Saskatchewan, where Kit plans to become a Mountie. En route, more people are murdered, posses and vigilantes join in the pursuit, and Kit eventually gives himself up, posing for the cameras and distributing souvenirs as befits a folk hero.

The subject matter of *Badlands* locates it squarely in the "outlaw couple on the run" tradition. Of such films as Fritz Lang's *You Only Live Once*, Nicholas Ray's *They Live by Night* and Arthur Penn's *Bonnie and Clyde*. (Malick makes specific acknowledgement to Penn in his end credits.) Two elements chiefly distinguish the film from its predecessors: one is its exceptional, even startling, visual beauty. Kit and Holly journey through landscapes and skyscrapes, of ethereal dreamlike loveliness, amid which their bleak amorality comes to seem almost a part of the natural world around them.

Malick's masterstroke, though, and the key to *Badlands*' idiosyncratic originality, lies in his use of voice-over narrative. Events are presented to us from two ironically counterpointed angles: what we see on the screen and—in running monologue—Holly's commentary on that, confided to her diary in blandly ingenuous prose. Her flat, detached narration veers in tone from *Huckleberry Finn* to *True Romance*, with the latter predominating. "Better to spend a week with one who loved me than years of loneliness," she observes emotionlessly, soon after Kit has shot her father. "He wanted to die with me and I dreamed of being lost forever in his arms." As Kit's behavior grows increasingly bizarre, Holly's equanimity never wavers: "Before we left," she notes, "he shot a football that he considered excess baggage."

The same surreal dissociation characterizes the dialogue, with comments ludicrously inadequate to the events they encompass. At one point the pair hole up with Cato, a friend of Kit's from the garbage run. Kit expects that Cato intends to turn them in, and shoots him. "How's he doing?" inquires Holly. "I got him in the stomach." "Is he upset?" "He didn't say anything about it." Holly, apparently wishing to make amends for any impoliteness to their host, then wanders over and has a little chat with the dying Cato about his pet spider.

Malick avoids any hint of didacticism, of psychological or sociological explication that could mar the smooth, ironic surface of his film. He also steers deliberately clear of nostalgia, though *Badlands* is carefully located in its 1959 setting. "The main reason for choosing the fifties was for its production values. . . I wanted the period to be very much a background detail. . . a time in the past. Nostalgia can give you a tin ear." In the main roles, Sissy Spacek and Martin Sheen turned in utterly authentic performances,

convincing down to the last detail. Malick himself showed up in a small part, as an architect who arrives at an inopportune moment; not a Hitchcockian gesture, simply that “we didn’t have enough money to fly someone in from Los Angeles.”

Badlands was bought by Warners (though Malick, thanks to his independent financing system, retained total control over copyright) and released to rapturous acclaim on both sides of the Atlantic. Malick was hailed as one of the most promising and individual directors to emerge from Hollywood for years; comparisons were made with Orson Welles. The director himself responded with diffidence: “I don’t yet feel I have a style or approach to filmmaking. Perhaps when I have ten films behind me I will have something worth saying.”

Michael Filippidis: On Malick’s Subjects (*Senses of Cinema*)

The release of Terrence Malick's *The Thin Red Line* (1998), after a twenty-year absence from directorial duties, made it possible to reassess one of the most singularly visionary and poetic voices in modern American cinema. Perhaps the most obvious point of comparison between the two earlier films, *Badlands* (1973) and *Days of Heaven* (1978), and *The Thin Red Line* is the sheer difference in subject of the latter film from the previous two. Malick's foray into a genre such as the combat film seems far removed from the austere Americana of his previous two films, and yet there is a definite logic as to why Malick would make such a film as I hope my examples from the two early films will show. What follows is therefore part surmise, part summation, as I venture to trace possible links between the intimate tone of Malick's two early films and the sound and fury of *The Thin Red Line*.

There is Only One Subject

To say that Malick is concerned with the mortality of his characters is to point to the obvious; in *Badlands* and *Days of Heaven*, all of the male protagonists meet premature deaths: Bill (Richard Gere) is shot-down, the Farmer (Sam Shepard) is stabbed, while Kit (Martin Sheen) we assume will be electrocuted. That Malick's male characters die violently, however, suggests a concern with something more than mortality alone. It is as if Malick's vision of human fate instinctively demands that all the men in his films die in the prime of life. For Malick, as for the viewer, something is irrevocably and painfully lost when in *Days of Heaven* Bill slumps forward into the water, the camera placed underwater to receive him as he breathes his last breath and then is carried away by the current. If there is a particular myth with which to identify such a trope it would be that of Venus and Adonis. Like Adonis, the men in Malick's films are killed while still young and like Adonis they have a Venus figure to memorialize their passing.

One need only look at the ending of *Days of Heaven* to realize just how much Malick equates being male with dying young. Towards the end of the film there is a brief scene at a train-station where Abby (Brooke Adams) waits for the next train out of town. In what I consider to be the most revealing moment of the film, Abby passes a group of soldiers bidding their loved-ones farewell as they prepare to journey to the battle-front. What is worth noting about this scene is the way in which it provides a historic context for the tragedy of the film's archetypal plot, namely World War I America. It is as though Malick is providing us with a clue to his true subject by having this small band of soldiers pop-up at just the right moment in the narrative to suggest a coda-like summation of a theme which has been played-out by three soloists, namely Bill, Abby and The Farmer. The sense of closure, and of utter waste, which is contained in Abby's brief glance at the soldiers, is uncanny.

In *Days of Heaven*, Bill's scheme for profiting from Abby's marriage to the Farmer is itself dependent upon the death of the Farmer. The film's narrative momentum is predicated upon the untimely demise of a man not much older than Bill or Abby. Death is thus an ingrained component of the film's thematic and narrative concerns. Far from being the end-point of a narrative, as in most classical narratives, imminent death here becomes a possible starting point for Bill, Abby and Linda (Linda Manz). The whole reason for these three characters finding themselves in the Texas wheat fields is due to Bill's fight with a supervisor which may have left the supervisor dead (we are never quite sure). In many ways, death and destruction are the forces which drive Malick's films onwards.

It would be appropriate to ask why Malick treats his male figures the way he does. If we compared the fate of his male characters with that of his female characters we would find a distinct pattern emerging with the males being killed-off while the females act as our entry-point into the narrative world of the film. Quentin Turnour notes: "The men always have the West in their heads. Both Bill and (in *Badlands*) Kit feel the national urge to flee to this pre-modern and extra-historic wilderness." Paradoxically, the result of this quest to flee modernity and history is to bring them closer towards it. Both Bill and Kit entangle themselves further and further into history and modernity by fleeing it: Kit by causing an interstate man-hunt and acquiring that most modern of inventions, celebrity; Bill by performing with the flying troupe and the reports of his progress in the newspapers. Of course, for both of them, it is their lovers who will be left behind to remember their lives. Ultimately, the task of 'journalising' the trajectory of their 'male flight' is left to the women.

In *Badlands* and *Days of Heaven* the women do the work of the film's narrative conscious. It is to the women that the task of remembering, intuiting, narrativising events is allocated. In these two films it is the women who are also granted moments of epiphany, such as when Holly (Sissy Spacek) realizes the vast enormity of the cosmos and of the world she inhabits by viewing picture-postcards through a viewing apparatus. Her epiphanic realization of the duality of consciousness is rendered in terms which resemble James Joyce's Stephen Hero when he writes a list of ever expanding domains which situate him; thus Holly speaks of the wonder of other people and of their lives in a moment which suggests that she is aware of the paradox of existence whereby we can be at one and the same time at the center of the universe and also at the periphery of it.

In Malick's first two films, women are the subjects of cinematic contemplation insofar as they have a richer range of visual cues and experiences to draw from. As Adrian Danks writes of the stereoscope images in *Badlands*, "it is simply possible to say that these scenes, people, and places existed. Their 'strangeness' is somehow familiarised, 'familialised' and lent continuity by Holly's chilling but homely voiceover." It is this awareness of the paradoxical strangeness and familiarity of these images, and of the world from which these images were produced (which is Holly's world and yet not Holly's world), which marks Holly as Malick's true Cartesian subject in much the same way that Rousseau's Emile serves to present both the theory and the practice of a modern subjecthood. Only with Malick, the subject is constructed along phenomenological lines making the recognition of a world beyond the self (through images of that world) the means by which a subject begins to transcendently perceive existence.

In *Days of Heaven* too, it is Linda, the waifish child narrator of the

film, who acquires a wider sense of self when she looks through an illustrated volume in the Farmer's library, or when seeing the grown-ups lose paradise through a telescope. As Adrian Danks points out, such instances of female contemplation, observation and interpretation are part of Malick's cinema just as they were a part of Max Ophüls' cinema before him. In a very important sense, Malick's work continues a tradition of women-centred films by such directors as Josef von Sternberg, Max Ophüls, and Kenji Mizoguchi; the defining factor in the formation of this list of directors is the way they each present us with non-misogynistic representations of women which foreground the female subject as the prime area of concern.

The men in Malick's first two films, however, become the objects of cinematic contemplation in a manner reminiscent of Josef von Sternberg's treatment of Gary Cooper as an object of erotic contemplation in *Morocco* (1930), while Marlene Dietrich becomes the subject of our emotional empathy as a result of what John Flaus has called "Sternberg's reverse sexism". One need only recall the way Richard Gere or Martin Sheen are presented to us as would-be Jimmy Deans to see how Malick's representation of these males, who are at once actor/character/persona, relies upon an objectification of the actor to a degree which makes them dominate the landscape of the film. Men in Malick's film's are always more memorable, as objects, than women.

For the men of these two films, no subjective consciousness is palpable to us; their identity, as well as their future prospects, are "all used-up" by their very quest to flee to a wilderness, to a new Eden. Whatever it is the men may have been after, modernity catches up with them sooner or later and swallows them up whole; hence all the new inventions which appear throughout the course of *Days of Heaven*, in particular, the phantom-like way in which Bill rides back into the lives of Abby, Linda and the Farmer astride a motorcycle, eyes goggled and long-coat draped in a manner not unlike something from the battlegrounds of Europe.

Indeed, not only the future, but history itself seems to conspire with Malick against the men in his films. In all three of the films Malick has directed so far there is an element of historical fact as the basis of the story: *Badlands* is derived from the Charles Starkweather serial killings; *Days of Heaven* astonishes us with the sheer attention to detail of its evocation of itinerant sackers, as though it were a documentary on the subject; and *The Thin Red Line* takes a major battle of the Pacific theatre as its point-of-origin.

It could be argued that the above pattern of roles for men and women do not operate in *The Thin Red Line*, as the film presents us with an ensemble of male characters who contribute to the task of providing a voice-over commentary for the film. True enough, Malick's latest film is a radical departure from his previous two in terms of the scale of his concern for existential matters, but the polyphonic nature of *The Thin Red Line* should not distract us from recognising the pattern at work in the first two films. Significantly, it is Miranda Otto's character who beckons to Ben Chaplin's Private Bell to, "Come out", and follow her to the ocean's blue caress in what is perhaps the film's most easily overlooked voiceover sequence.

Apart from the young mother Private Witt (James Caviezel) meets while AWOL and Witt's memories of his own mother, the wife of Private Bell is the only female presence of any significance in the whole film. During the sequences in which we are shown Bell's life

with his wife, the climactic point occurs when we finally hear her beckon to him with these few words of invitation. After the capture of the Japanese camp when Bell receives the letter from his wife asking for a divorce, we again hear her voice. Malick's presentation of this sequence is such as to make us believe that the young officer we see Miranda Otto waiting for, as the text of the letter is read out, will be Bell himself. In fact, the figure walking into focus and eventually embracing Miranda Otto's character is a stranger, and then we hear the words which confirm the catastrophe. As with the women in the previous two films, Bell's wife is unable to remain steadfast and true. Malick's view of the women in his films is not misogynistic - after all, the men they have to deal with are quite a motley crew of dreamers and nuts - but one that views the women as engaged in a different order of struggle. For the women, the struggle is one of dissolution and identity; for the men, it is a struggle between mortality and transcendence.

Malick's favourite device, the voiceover, is worth examining in detail as it provides the entry-point into all three of his films. For Colin MacCabe, Malick's use of voiceover in the *The Thin Red Line* is "marred" by the script which, as MacCabe puts it:

buries an excellent 90-minute war movie in a stream of pretentious, portentous and sententious verbiage which, at least on first hearing, is nothing more than a mishmash of recycled clichés about nature and violence.

I should add that I disagree with this assessment, mainly because it stems from what I believe is MacCabe's misunderstanding of what Malick set out to do: namely an existential drama set in the context of modern warfare.

Reading MacCabe's article in *Sight and Sound*, one senses his disappointment is caused as much with the above script faults he identifies as with the fact that all he really wants is for *The Thin Red Line* to emulate the classic combat film paradigm as articulated in *The Story of G.I. Joe* (William Wellman, 1945) and so many of Samuel Fuller's films. MacCabe fails to see how his disappointment with the film's mythopoeic as opposed to historic concerns are in themselves a misreading of the film. It's a bit like blaming Homer for not being as good a historian as Herodotus was and getting all the military manoeuvres incorrect in *The Illiad*. But the mythic aspect of warfare is precisely the point of the film insofar as myths can be both personal and communal. When MacCabe criticises Malick for failing to present any sense of the historical ramifications of the Pacific campaign, he forgets the devastating words of Sargent Welsh (Sean Penn) immediately after risking his life by heroically taking morphine to a dying soldier: "Property! The whole thing's about fucking property." But, lest I be seen to be too harsh on Colin MacCabe, I would point out that Gavin Smith writes eloquently and sympathetically about the way in which *The Thin Red Line* "evade[s] the mythopoeic impulse", though in the very next line he defines this impulse in terms which concur with my above metaphor regarding Homer and Herodotus: namely as, "that which makes a film larger than life and proffers it to stand in for history".

Smith perceptively notes that it is only in *The Thin Red Line* that Malick succeeds in creating a "protagonist" who has enough "receptivity and empathy with any chosen object of contemplation" to make possible the aesthetic transcendence he strives for in his films. No other male character in Malick's films is so suited to acting

as a cypher for the sublime, or as Smith writes: "to behold the eternal confrontation of nature and culture for what it is, and to be able to articulate a metaphysical perspective". It is significant that twenty plus years divide the first two films from the third. That Malick has succeeded in rendering a truly subjective male protagonist in this last film is testament to his twenty-year incubation and maturation as a filmmaker. There are, however, crucial differences in the way subjectivity is articulated and, in some instances, formed, between the two periods. As Gavin Smith also notes, in the earlier films the voiceovers belong to young girls who are often not very articulate about their situation, while in the last film the ensemble of voiceovers belong to an adult view of the world which is less impressionable. Ultimately, the critical difference which reasserts itself in all three films is that the men who count as the protagonists of the film die, regardless of their status as subjects. Private Witt's sacrificial death, with its serene calm in the face of imminent death, matching that of his mother at her passing, is the moment of absolute transcendence in the film. Malick's achievement in *The Thin Red Line*, is in capturing that serenity for all time.

Roger Ebert's Movie Home Companion 1990 Edition. Roger Ebert. Andrews and McMeel NY 1990

Terence Malick's *Badlands* calls them Kit and Holly, but his characters are inspired, of course, by Charles Starkweather and Caril Ann Fugate. They went on a wild ride in 1958 that ended with eleven people shot dead. The press named him the Mad Dog Killer, and Sunday supplement psychoanalysts said he killed because the kids at school kidded him about his bowlegs. Starkweather got the electric chair on June 25, 1959. From time to time a story appears about Caril Ann Fugate's appeals to her parole board. She was sentenced to life.

She claimed she was kidnapped and forced to go along with Starkweather. When they were first captured, he asked the deputies to leave her alone: "She didn't do nothing." Later, at his trial, he claimed she was the most trigger-happy person he ever knew, and was responsible for some of the killings. It is a case that is still not closed, although *Badlands* sees her as a child of vast simplicity who went along at first because she was flattered that he liked her: "I wasn't popular at school on account of having no personality and not

being pretty."

The film is tied together with her narrations, written like an account of summer vacation crossed with the breathless prose style of a movie magazine. Some of the dialogue is loosely inspired by a book written by James Reinhardt, a criminologist who interviewed Starkweather on death row. Starkweather was offended by his death sentence. He viewed his crimes with total uninvolvedness and asked how it was fair for him to die before he'd even been to a big city, or eaten in a fine restaurant, or seen a major league game. That's what the movie captures too: The detachment with which Kit views his killings, as Holly eventually draws away from him. He gets no pleasure from killing. He sees it only as necessary. He offers explanations which satisfy her for a while: "I killed them because they was bounty hunters who wanted the reward money. If they was policemen, just being paid for doing their job, that would have been different."

The movie makes no attempt to psychoanalyze its Kit Carruthers, and there are no symbols to note or lessons to learn. What comes through more than anything else is the enormous loneliness of the lives these two characters lived, together and apart. He is ten years older than she is, but they're both caught up in the same adolescent love fantasy at first, as if Nat King Cole would always be there to sing "A Blossom Fell" on the portable radio while they held their sweaty embrace. . . .

After the first murder and their flight, they never have any extended conversations about anything, nor are they seen to make love, nor is their journey given any symbolic meaning. . . .

The movie is very reserved in its attitude toward the characters. It observes them, most of the time, dispassionately. They are strange people, as were their real-life models; they had no rationalizations like Dillinger's regard for the poor or Bonnie and Clyde's ability to romanticize themselves romantically. They were just two dumb kids who got into a thing and didn't have the sense to stop. They're something like the kids in Robert Altman's *Thieves Like Us* and the married couple in *Sugarland Express*. They are in over their heads, incapable of understanding murder as a crime rather than a convenience, inhabitants of lives so empty that even their sins cannot fill them.

Final four screenings in the Fall 2004 Buffalo Film Seminars:

November 16 Andrei Tarkovsky **The Mirror** (1974)

Nov 23 Stanley Kubrick **Barry Lyndon** (1975)

Nov 30 Martin Scorsese **Raging Bull** (1980)

Dec 7 Orson Welles **Citizen Kane** (1939)

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