

## THE BUFFALO FILM SEMINARS

CONVERSATIONS ABOUT GREAT FILMS WITH BRUCE JACKSON & DIANE CHRISTIAN

PRESENTED BY THE UNIVERSITY AT BUFFALO AND THE MARKET ARCADE FILM AND ARTS CENTER

### MARCH 12, 2002 (V:8): THE MAN WHO SHOT LIBERTY VALANCE, 1962

**JOHN FORD** (Sean Aloysius O'Fearná, 1 February 1894, Cape Elizabeth, Maine – 31 August 1973, Palm Desert, California, cancer) directed 146 films, 54 of them westerns. He won four Academy Awards for Best Director (\*), two more for best documentary (#), five New York Film Critics Best Director awards (+), the Directors' Guild of America Life Achievement Award (1954), and the first American Film Institute Life Achievement Award (1973). Some of his films are: *The Informer*\*+ 1935, *The Prisoner of Shark Island* 1936, *Stagecoach* 1939+, *Drums Along the Mohawk* 1939, *The Long Voyage Home*+1940, *The Grapes of Wrath*\*+ 1940, *Tobacco Road* 1941, *How Green Was My Valley*+ 1941,\* *The Battle of Midway*# 1942 (which he also photographed and edited), *December 7<sup>th</sup>*# 1943, *They Were Expendable* 1945, *My Darling Clementine* 1946, *Fort Apache* 1948, *She Wore a Yellow Ribbon* 1949, *Rio Grande* 1950, *What Price Glory?* 1952, *The Quiet Man*\* 1952, *Mogambo* 1953, *Mister Roberts* 1955, *The Searchers* 1956, *The Rising of the Moon* 1957, *The Last Hurrah* 1958, *Sergeant Rutledge* 1960, *The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance* 1962, *Donovan's Reef* 1963, and *Cheyenne Autumn* 1964. His older brother Francis started in movies in 1907 and changed his name to Ford. Jack joined him in Hollywood in 1914, acted in a dozen serials and features, and began directing in 1917. He did three films in 1939, all of them classics: *Drums Along the Mohawk* (starring Henry Fonda and Claudette Colbert), *Young Mr. Lincoln* (starring Fonda), and *Stagecoach* (which made a star of John Wayne). He's known (and has famously identified himself as a maker of westerns, but he's done a large number of non-western classics as well, such as *The Grapes of Wrath*, *How Green Was My Valley*, and the wartime documentaries. But the westerns dominate: *My Darling Clementine*, his so-called "Cavalry Trilogy" (*Fort Apache*, *She Wore a Yellow Ribbon*, and *Rio Grande*), all of them starring Wayne, and *The Searchers*, also starring Wayne. He had what amounted to a stock company of leading actors (John Wayne, Harry Carey, John Carradine, Henry Fonda) and supporting actors (Ward Bond, Ken Curtis, Jane Darwell, Francis Ford, Ben Johnson, Victor McLaglen, Mae Marsh, Mildred Natwick, John Qualen, Woody Strode, Tom Tyler, and Patrick Wayne). His westerns had various settings, but he shot most of them in Monument Valley, Arizona, because he liked the look of the place. Whenever there was a funeral in one of his films, the mourners usually sang "Shall We Gather at the River." When C.B. DeMille and other Hollywood McCarthyites got in the witch hunting bandwagon, it was Ford who most publicly and famously stood up to them.

**JAMES WARNER BELLAH** (14 September 1899 – 22 September 1976, California) wrote 19 novels, and the stories on which *Rio Grande*, *She Wore a Yellow Ribbon* and *Fort Apache* were based. **DOROTHY M. JOHNSON** wrote the novel, *A Man Called Horse*, and the stories on which *The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance* and *The Hanging Tree* were based. She published four books of short fiction, the two best of which are *Indian Country* (1953) and *The Hanging Tree* (1957). **WILLIAM H. CLOTHIER** (21 February 1903, Decatur, Illinois – 7 January 1996, Los Angeles) shot 57 films, 6 of them directed by John Ford and starring John Wayne (*Cheyenne Autumn*, *Donovan's Reef*, *Flashing Spikes*, *Fort Apache*, *The Horse Soldiers*, *Liberty Valance*). He also shot 11 other Wayne films (among them *The Alamo* 1960, *Big Jake* 1971, *Chisum* 1970, *Rio Lobo* 1970, and *The Undeclared* 1969).

**LEE MARVIN** (19 February 1924, New York, New York – 29 August 1987, Tucson, Arizona, heart attack) played thugs for much of his film career, was a direct descendant of George Washington and Thomas Jefferson, got a Purple Heart in the invasion of Saipan, was Spielberg's first choice for Quint in *Jaws*, and is buried next to Joe Louis in Arlington National Cemetery. **His bio from Leonard Maltin's Movie Encyclopedia:** "Rugged actor who, like many tough-looking leading men, started his movie career as a heavy, then graduated to heroic roles when he became a star. Marvin, a WW2 veteran, took up acting in the late 1940s following an unfulfilling stint as a plumber. Initially appearing in summer stock and off-Broadway productions, he graduated to the Great White Way in 1951. That same year, he broke into movies with a bit part in *You're in the Navy Now* and two years later achieved recognition as the psychopathic gang leader who hurled scalding coffee in his girlfriend's face in *The Big Heat* (1953). Marvin also played a rival gang leader in *The Wild One* (1954), a nasty townsman in *Bad Day at Black Rock* a burned-out jazzman in *Pete Kelly's Blues* (both 1955), and Western baddies in *Gun Fury*, *The Stranger Wore a Gun* (both in 1953), *Seven Men From Now* (1956), and *The Comancheros* (1961). After starring for three seasons on the TV cop show "M Squad" (1957-60), he reached his apex as a big-screen bad guy playing the whipcracking terror of John Ford's *The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance* (1962), which starred John Wayne and James Stewart. Following the lighthearted *Donovan's Reef* (1963, again for Ford), Marvin returned to form as the contract killer who guns down crime boss Ronald Reagan (in his

THE MAN WHO SHOT LIBERTY VALANCE (1962) 123 minutes  
Directed by John Ford  
Written by James Warner Bellah and Willis Goldbeck  
based on a story by Dorothy M. Johnson  
Produced by Willis Goldbeck  
Cinematography by William H. Clothier  
Costume Design by Edith Head  
Farcot Edouart.... process photography

John Wayne.... Tom Doniphon  
James Stewart.... Ransom Stoddard Attorney-At-Law  
Vera Miles.... Hallie Stoddard  
Lee Marvin.... Liberty Valance  
Edmond O'Brien... Dutton Peabody (Editor of the *Shinbone Star*)  
Andy Devine... Marshal Link Appleyard  
Ken Murray... Doc Willoughby  
John Carradine.... Major Cassius Starbuckle  
Jeanette Nolan.... Nora Ericson  
John Qualen.... Peter Ericson  
Willis Bouchee.... Jason Tully (Conductor)  
Carleton Young... Maxwell Scott  
Woody Strode.... Pompey  
Denver Pyle... Amos Carruthers  
Strother Martin.... Floyd  
Lee Van Cleef.... Reese  
Robert F. Simon.... Handy Strong  
O.Z. Whitehead.... Herbert Carruthers  
Paul Birch... Mayor Winder  
Joseph Hoover.... Charlie Hasbrouck (Reporter for the *Star*)

last film) in *The Killers* (1964). He followed that with a memorable turn as a washed-up ball player in *Ship of Fools* (1965). Next came the Western spoof *Cat Ballou* (also 1965); Marvin's dual role as a drunken gunslinger and a tin-nosed desperado won him an Oscar and elevated him to leading-man status. He maintained it by heading up two all-star action blockbusters, *The Professionals* (1966) and *The Dirty Dozen* (1967), and for the next 20 years gave solid performances in such varied films as the quirky thriller *Point Blank* (1967), the two-man war movie *Hell in the Pacific* (1968), the big-budget musical *Paint Your Wagon* (1969), the elegiac Western *Monte Walsh* (1970), the satiric gangster opus *Prime Cut* (1972), the allegorical train adventure *Emperor of the North* (1973), the comic Western *Great Scout and Cathouse Thursday* (1976), and Sam Fuller's autobiographical war film, *The Big Red One* (1980), which gave him one of his all-time best parts as an indomitable sergeant in the infantry. Later films include *Death Hunt* (1980), *Gorky Park* (1983), *The Delta Force* (1986), and a TV movie sequel "The Dirty Dozen: The Next Mission" (1985). Perhaps his most underrated work was his performance as Hickey in the 1973 film adaptation of Eugene O'Neill's *The Iceman Cometh*. Marvin also left a legacy of quite a different sort: his longtime companion, Michelle Triola, successfully sued him for support after their breakup, bringing the word "palimony" into the American lexicon.

**JOHN WAYNE** (Marion Robert Morrison [his parents later changed it to Marion Michael when they named their second son Robert], 26 May 1907, Winterset, Iowa – 11 June 1979, Los Angeles, California, lung & stomach cancer) performed in nearly 200 movies, starting with *Brown of Harvard* 1926 (an uncredited role as a Yale football player) and ending with *The Shootist* 1976. He seems to hold the record for the most leading parts: 142 of them. Marlene Dietrich, upon seeing John Wayne for the first time, is supposed to have said, "Oh, daddy, buy me that." Wayne, writes Leonard Maltin, "has come to represent the archetypal American of our country's formative period: honest, direct, decisive, solitary, and reverent; one whose faith in his own ability enables him to take action when it's needed, and whose belief in justice spurs him to right wrongs when they're discovered. John Wayne, nicknamed 'Duke,' played that character-or variations on it-in almost every movie he made, and it became so much a part of him that most people couldn't separate the real Wayne from his screen persona." He worked in low-budget westerns until his role in Ford's *Stagecoach* made him a star. He did his best work playing a character like himself, or what he thought himself to be; when he ranged afield (*The Green Berets* 1968, Ghengis Kahn in *The Conqueror* 1956, *McQ* 1974) the pictures were usually awful. Some of his other films are: *The Cowboys* (1972), *True Grit* (1969), *Donovan's Reef* (1963), *The Longest Day* (1962), *The Alamo* (1960), *Rio Bravo* (1959), *Rio Grande* (1950), *Sands of Iwo Jima* (1949), *She Wore a Yellow Ribbon* (1949), *Wake of the Red Witch* (1948), *Fort Apache* (1948), *They Were Expendable* (1945), *Back to Bataan* (1945), and *The Fighting Seabees* (1944). He won a Best Actor Academy Award for *True Grit* and had a nomination for *Sands of Iwo Jima* (which was the only movie we were allowed to watch in Marine Corps boot camp in Parris Island a very long time ago; they showed it to us a lot).

**JAMES STEWART** (20 May 1908, Indiana, Pennsylvania – 2 July 1997, Los Angeles, pulmonary blood clot) a real-life Eagle Scout, Princeton graduate (architecture) and war hero. According to IMDB he was "the first movie star to enter the service for World War II, joining a year before Pearl Harbor was bombed. He was initially refused entry into the Air Force because he weighed 5 pounds less than the required 148 pounds, but he talked the recruitment officer into ignoring the test. He eventually became a Colonel, and earned the Air Medal, the Distinguished Flying Cross, the Croix de Guerre and 7 battle stars. In 1959, served in the Air Force Reserve, he became a brigadier general." "One of America's most beloved actors," wrote Leonard Maltin, "Stewart today is less movie star than cultural icon, a gracefully aged embodiment of values and traditions our nation holds dear, as we are continually reminded by endless broadcasts of his best-remembered film, *It's a Wonderful Life*. The tall, gangly, soft-spoken youth who endeared himself to moviegoers by virtue of his appealing diffidence, boyish earnestness, and innate kindness is the Stewart most film lovers cherish, although he certainly proved that he was much more, especially in his films of the 1950s and 1960s." He was nominated for best actor Oscars for *Anatomy of a Murder* 1959, *Harvey* 1950, *It's a Wonderful Life* 1946, and *Mr. Smith Goes to Washington* 1939; he won for *The Philadelphia Story* 1940. He also won an honorary Oscar for his whole career in 1985. Some of his other films are *The Shootist* (1976), *Fools' Parade* (1971), *The Cheyenne Social Club* (1970), *The Flight of the Phoenix* (1965), *Cheyenne Autumn* (1964), *Vertigo* (1958), *The Spirit of St. Louis* (1957), *Rear Window* (1954), *Rope* (1948), *Call Northside 777* (1948), and *Destry Rides Again* (1939).

**VERA MILES** (Vera May Ralston, 23 August 1929, Boise City, Oklahoma) was the 1948 "Miss Kansas," went to Hollywood, had small roles until Ford cast her in *The Searchers* (1956). "How many actresses," write Leonard Maltin, "can claim to have been favorites of Alfred Hitchcock, John Ford, and Walt Disney? ...She showed tremendous skill and range as Henry Fonda's beleaguered wife in Hitchcock's *The Wrong Man* (1957). Pregnancy cost her the lead in *Vertigo* but Hitchcock did cast her as Janet Leigh's sister in *Psycho* (1960), which made her the one who discovered the truth about Norman Bates' mother. Following another stint for Ford in 1962's *The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance* she got her first parts at the Disney studio, in *A Tiger Walks* (1964) and *Those Calloways* (1965, a particularly good role), which led to a long string of Disney commitments into the 1970s. Better parts came her way in episodic TV than onscreen from that time on. In 1983 she reprised her most famous role in *Psycho II* vociferously protesting the proposed parole of killer Norman Bates (played, as in the original, by Anthony Perkins)."

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**Andrew Tudor, JOHN FORD entry in *World Film Directors V I*, ed. John Wakeman, The H.W. Wilson Co, NY 1987.**

He found a variety of employment in the booming industry, including stunt work and doubling for his brother, assistant cameraman and riding with the Ku Klux Klan in *Birth of a Nation*. He became proficient as a cameraman and editor, and often functioned as such throughout his career. Although accounts disagree, he had definitely graduated to assistant directing by 1916.

[he made 26 films with Harry Carey, at least 30 films by 1920] Few have survived, and it is possible that there were others of

which records no longer exist. Ford himself described this series of Westerns as 'character stories' built around Carey in the role of a saddle-tramp—a character of some integrity, but not a 'hero' in the then conventional sense. Scripts were co-authored with Carey and shot on location within a week.

[Ford visited Germany during the shooting of *Four Sons* (1928) and met Murnau and other German filmmakers.] It is tempting to see their influence in his emerging visual style, doubly so in that he acknowledged no mentors other than his brother, Harry Carey,

and D.W. Griffith. It is a difficult judgment to make. The clearest stylistic feature of Ford's early cinema is its inclination to pictorialism, to studied effects of composition and lighting, a tendency as much apparent before *Four Sons* as after it. Anderson argues that "at times in *Four Sons* the influence is strong, with movements that recall German camera handling and lighting effects that verge on the expressionistic." With so many films "lost," however, it is all but impossible to make the appropriate before-and-after comparisons, especially in a period when German influence on American cinema was widespread.

In many ways *Stagecoach* is the foundation stone of the modern Western, for, just as it was the occasion for Ford to find a mature outlook upon the landscape and characters of his early cinema, it also heralded a new seriousness and legitimacy for the Western genre. The French critic and theorist André Bazin saw it as the consummate classical Western, "the ideal balance between social myth, historical reconstruction, psychological truth, and the traditional theme of Western *mise-en-scène*." With its stagecoach laden with characters who were, or who were to become, archetypes of the Western genre, it now looks far more clichéd than would have been the case in 1939.

It also brought John Wayne to stardom. A descendant of the Harry Carey figure in the early Ford Westerns, Wayne's Ringo Kid is in genesis the honest man of few words and profound actions who stands at the heart of Ford's vision. In genesis only, however, for *Stagecoach* viewed in the context of Ford's subsequent work seems a somewhat contrived sketch for what was to follow, not a fully realized achievement. It is a story very well told, and our pleasure in its magnificent Monument Valley settings, its compelling narrative, and its visual elegance, should not disguise the economy and skill with which its characters are presented to us and developed. In the end, though, it lacks the elegiac spirit of *My Darling Clementine* (1946), the irony of *The Searchers* (1956), and the richness of *The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance* (1962).

*Grapes of Wrath* –the novel's humanity without its disturbing edge. Ford's film is a powerful experience, but apolitical and individualistic in its affirmation of human fortitude in the face of desperate adversity.

*The Searchers* is more than simply a touching story. In its treatment of its central character it gives us the Western hero trapped forever in a world of his making, but a world to which he can no longer belong. It is this sustained reflection upon the major themes of the genre that finally raises *The Searchers* beyond Ford's other work, giving it the status of tragedy. When Ethan turns away at the end it is a profoundly moving moment. McBride and Wilmington, who believe this to be Ford's indubitable masterpiece, put it this way in their monograph on Ford: "[Ethan] . . . steps aside to let the young couple pass him by and turns away to 'wander forever between the winds' like his Indian nemesis. Scar and Ethan, blood-brothers in their commitment to primitive justice, have sacrificed themselves to make civilization possible. This is the meaning of the door opening and closing on the wilderness. It is the story of America."

It was only with *The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance* (1962) that Ford successfully returned to the ethically complex world of *The Searchers*.

That said, it must also be conceded that in some respects *Liberty Valance* is far from typical Ford. There are no grand landscapes (indeed, there are precious few exteriors) and the film's visual style makes it almost claustrophobic. It is frequently observed that Ford was ill at the time of shooting *Liberty Valance* and thus unable to work on location. While there is no doubt that he was ill, it is difficult to see how this particular story could have benefitted from location work; as a narrative it is necessarily set in the town of Shinbone, and its thematic concerns are eminently suited to the "closed in" world suggested by Ford's careful framing and camerawork. Although lacking the tragic scale of *The Searchers*, it is a deeply sad movie, and there are critics who believe *Liberty Valance* to be at least the equal of Ford's finest.

As with *The Searchers*, the basis for this evaluation is to be found in Ford's apparently changing vision. *Liberty Valance* stands as his final word on the recurrent tensions between wilderness and civilization, individual and community. Not for the first time in Ford, but for the first time with such absolute consistency and clarity, these oppositions are captured in the casting of the movie's central characters. Doniphon (John Wayne) and Stoddard (James Stewart) embody both the virtues and failings of, respectively, the individualist at home in the wilderness and the bringer of "civilized" legal order to the community. The fundamental narrative device has Stoddard, who is opposed to the rule of law by violence, forced into a situation in which he must face the notorious gunman Liberty Valance. He is victorious, and his success brings him fame and power as "the man who shot Liberty Valance." The truth, however, is otherwise. Doniphon, knowing Stoddard has no chance and impelled by his own standards of integrity, shoots Valance from the shadows, leaving Stoddard to take the credit and the girl whom Doniphon loves. Once more the traditional Man of the West has been sacrificed in the cause of civilization.

The story, already laden with saddening echoes of previous Westerns, is made all but unbearably poignant by its framing a final revelation by the aging Senator Stoddard on the occasion of Doniphon's death. He tells the story to the editor of the Shinbone *Star* in explanation of his arrival at the funeral of an unknown pauper, fully recognizing the political price he might have to pay. But in one of the most famous lines in a Ford movie, the editor (Edmond O'Brien) declines to print: "This is the West, sir. When the legend conflicts with the facts, print the legend." The matter is not left there, however, which would have taken us no further than, say, the end of *Fort Apache*. Instead, in an exquisitely shot scene, we are returned to Doniphon's coffin where Hallie (one of Ford's stronger female characters, played by Vera Miles) is waiting, and, only as Stoddard turns for a last look, do we see that she has planted a cactus rose on the otherwise bare box. Both flower of the Garden and enduring survivor of the Wilderness, the cactus rose (which we have earlier seen as a gift from Doniphon to Hallie) becomes the perfect symbol for the film.

The train takes them away from Shinbone through lushly fruitful country. "Aren't you proud?" Hallie asks. "Once it was a desert and now it's a garden." Stoddard talks of retirement until, on the arrival of the train's conductor to attend his famous passenger, he reverts to the politician's front that has served him so well. The conductor's response to his thanks is sudden and sobering: "Don't you worry about that, Senator. Nothing's too good for the man who shot Liberty Valance." With that ironic line, and our final shot of Stoddard and Hallie lost in their regrets, we reach the last stop in Ford's journey through the West. The captivating

optimism of *Drums Along the Mohawk* and *My Darling Clementine* has been replaced by the irony and sadness of *The Searchers* and *The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance*. Yet all is not regret, and Ford has showed us the benefits of civilization as well as its price. He was never a filmmaker given to simple didacticism, and both these great achievements of his last years have a density of reference and a control of style that makes them for many his richest reflections upon and within the Western genre.

Though he lived for a decade after *Liberty Valance*, illness effectively ended Ford's career in 1966.

Orson Welles, asked which American directors he most admired,

**John Baxter in *The St. James Film Directors Encyclopedia*. Ed. Andrew Sarris. Visible Ink NY 1998.**

John Ford has no peers in the annals of cinema. This is not to place him above criticism, merely above comparison. His faults were unique, as was his art, which he pursued with a single-minded and single-hearted stubbornness for sixty years and 112 films. Ford grew up with the American cinema. That he should have begun his career as an extra in the Ku Klux Klan sequences of *The Birth of a Nation* and ended it supervising the documentary *Vietnam! Vietnam!* conveys the remarkable breadth of his contribution to film, and the narrowness of its concerns.

Mythologizing the armed services and the church as paradigms of structural integrity, Ford adapts their rules to his private world. All may speak in Ford's films, but when divine order is invoked, the faithful fall silent, to fight and die as decreed by a general, a president, or some other God-anointed elite.

In Ford's hierarchy, Native and African Americans share the lowest rung, women the next. Businessmen, uniformly corrupt in his world, hover below the honest and imaginative citizenry of the United States. Above them are Ford's elite, within which members of the armed forces occupy a privileged position. In authority over them is an officer class of career military men and priests, culminating in a few near-saintly figures of which Abraham Lincoln is the most notable, while over all rules a retributory, partial, and jealous God.

The consistency of Ford's work lies in his fidelity to the morality implicit in this structure.

When, in his last decades of work, he returned to reexamine earlier films in a series of revealing remakes, the skeptical saw not a moving reiteration of values but a decline into self-plagiarism. Yet it is *The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance*, in which he deals with the issues raised in *Stagecoach*, showing his beloved populist west destroyed by law and literacy, that stands today among his most important films.

Belligerent, grandiose, deceitful, and arrogant in real life, Ford seldom let those traits spill over into his films. They express at their best a guarded serenity, a skeptical satisfaction in the beauty of the American landscape, muted always by an understanding of the dangers implicit in the land, and a sense of the responsibility of all men to protect the common heritage. In every Ford film there is a gun behind the door, a conviction behind the joke, a challenge in every toast. Ford belongs in the tradition of American narrative art where telling a story and drawing a moral are twin aspects of public utterance. He saw that we live in history, and that history embodies lessons we must earn. When Fordian man speaks, the audience is meant to listen—and listen all the harder for the restraint and circumspection of the man who speaks. One hears the authentic Fordian voice nowhere more powerfully than in Ward Bond's preamble to the celebrating enlisted men in *They Were Expendable* as they toast the retirement of a comrade. "I'm not going to make a speech," he states. "I've just got something to say."

**Satyajit Ray, "A Tribute to John Ford," *Our Films Their Films*. Satyajit Ray. Hyperion NY 1994**

The nearest description of Ford's [hallmark] would be a combination of strength and simplicity. The nearest equivalent I can think of is musical: middle-period Beethoven.

Like Picasso's obsession with the bull, Cézanne's with the apple, Bach's with the fugue, and the Hindu miniaturists' with the theme of Krishna, John Ford had a lifelong affair with the Western. 'When in doubt, make a Western,' is reported to have been his maxim. One only wishes he had been in doubt oftener.

For those who look for 'commitment' in the cinema in the new fashionable sense of the term, the work of Ford—as well as most of the great American directors prior to the 1960s—will have nothing to offer. But for those who look for art, for poetry, for a

replied "the old masters...By which I mean John Ford, John Ford, and John Ford."

"As a kid," he told Peter Bogdanovich, "I thought I was going to be a great artist; I used to sketch and paint a great deal and I think, for a kid, I did pretty good work – at least I received a lot of compliments about it. But I have never thought about what I was doing in terms of art, or 'this is great,' or 'world-shaking' or anything like that. To me, it was always a job of work – which I enjoyed immensely – and that's it."

clean, healthy, robust attitude to life and human relationships, John Ford is among the most rewarding of directors. He was also unique in having won unreserved admiration from eminent film makers from all parts of the world—from Eisenstein in Soviet Russia, Kurosawa in Japan, Bergman in Sweden, and Orson Welles in the USA.

There is little doubt that this admiration was based primarily on the genre that Ford perfected. Along with slapstick comedy, the Western is the least literary of film genres. No wonder Ford's genius for pure cinema shone most luminously in it.

The distinction consists, as in all great film makers, in the manner of telling the stories; in how Ford uses his tools, how he stages his

actions and photographs them, where he places his camera, how the shots and scenes follow one another, how the pace and the pulse of the film derive from the cutting. Among other things, Ford was a master of the static shot, of the 'telling' composition. There is rarely any movement of the camera within a shot unless it happens to be part of a larger action. This is a method which lies at the other extreme from, say, Orson Welles. One can say that in a Ford film the camera is a sensitive observer, always sure of the best viewpoint, while in Welles it is a dextrous participant, exploring all manner of viewpoints.

Much of the best things in a Ford film has the mysterious, indefinable quality of poetry. Because some of them seem casual—even accidental—it is difficult to realise how much experience and mastery lie behind them.

[he describes a moment from *Fort Apache*] What it does is to invest a casual moment with poetic significance. Those who look for 'meaning' here, whether symbolic or literary, and are disappointed not to find it, are obviously unaware of what makes for poetry in the cinema. All the best Ford films are full of such poetic details, which, taken in conjunction with the sweep and vigour of the action sequences, give the films their satisfying richness.

**Peter Bogdanovich, *John Ford*, U Cal press 1978**

B: Toward the start of *Liberty Valance*, when Vera Miles comes to Wayne's burned-out house, isn't the music the Ann Rutledge theme from *Young Mr. Lincoln*?

F: Yes, it was the same; we bought it from Al Newman. I love it – one of my favorite tunes – one I can hum. Generally, I hate music in pictures – a little bit now and then, at the end or the start – but something like the Ann Rutledge theme *belongs*. I don't like to see a man alone in the desert, dying of thirst, with the Philadelphia Orchestra behind him.

**Ronald L. Davis, *John Ford: Hollywood's Old Master*. U Oklahoma Press 1995**

*The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance* would be Ford's last great film. He insisted on shooting it in black and white, wanting a dark anachronistic look, since the picture incorporated his diminishing faith in American values. No longer did he feel like celebrating the course of civilization, which he accepted, but did not necessarily see as progress. "For a change, no locations," Ford wrote Wayne in July 1961. "All to be shot on the lot." The director wanted a claustrophobic feel and photographed all but three days inside a Paramount studio.

In *The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance* Ford confronted the losses of the past – his personal and professional losses, as well as broad historical sacrifices. The picture makes a melancholy and troubling statement, yet one consistent with the dark side of Ford's romanticism. Toward the end he questioned the mythology he had himself invented over four and a half decades of filmmaking. While Ford admired Tom Doniphon and regretted the passing of frontier individualism, he saw value in Ransom Stoddard as a

modern and more flexible male who could wash dishes and wear an apron without losing his masculinity.

When asked if his view of the West was becoming increasingly sad, Ford answered, "Possibly. I don't know; I'm not a psychologist. Maybe I'm getting older." *The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance* would be his last complete Western with John Wayne. Despite recent tension between them, both knew that their association, personally and professionally, had been unique and shared regret over the changes that had taken place in their industry. "Those were great days," Wayne said. "You're not supposed to look back, but it's pretty hard not to when there were guys like Ward and Jack. You don't meet them every day."

**Lindsay Anderson, *About JOHN FORD*. . . . Plexus, London, 1999**

Dan Ford mentions how many of the people who worked on *Liberty Valance* remarked Ford's 'lack of energy', his 'complete disregard for background effects, for extras, for smoke and commotion. Partly, no doubt, this was yet another instance of Ford's growing impatience with the business of shooting: it was no longer 'fun'. He resented the demands of narrative, of crowd-pleasing spectacle, the trappings of 'art'. And in places the work suffered. The lighting of this picture is at times only serviceable, inexpressive even when the image is an important one: a shot of the cactus rose which Tom has brought for Hallie, and which Pompey has planted for her, looks like something shot in a hurry, in the last ten minutes of a long day; and the hold-up of the stage which introduces *Liberty Valance* has the cramped artificiality of a scene in a 'B' picture. And yet, whether by design or by accident, this lack of visual refinement has an artistic result which is not just negative. The lines of the story emerge clearly, sparsely, with no decorative distraction.

So, all through the story, the ironies and ambiguities multiply. The young lawyer who believes in the rule of law can only survive by the strong arm of the man of action: the generosity of the man of action costs him his hope of happiness. The idealist wins acceptance for his peaceable creed because he is believed to have killed a man: the man who really fires the shot receives no honour for it. Tom Doniphon 'kills the thing he loves' when he saves Rance Stoddard's life: and Rance is thereby condemned to a life of acclamation that is based on a lie. (Even Hallie's successful marriage is built on the same deception: when, one wonders, did she learn the truth?) Only a great poet—as Ford was to the end—could have filled an anecdote so neatly ironic with such regret, such humour, such reverberation of emotion. In *The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance* the realist and the romantic come together. The desert, yes, has become a garden; newspapers are published, children grow up safe; 'some day' has become a reality. And the price has been paid. Tom Doniphon lies forgotten in his plain wooden box, with only Pompey to mourn for him; and a certain gallantry has gone with him.

'Print the legend,' says the editor of the *Shinbone Star*. It is both a cynical and a poetic statement: in any event a summing-up.

. . . a stoic and accepting close.

**THIS WEEK IN THE MAFAC SUNDAY CLASSICS:** March 17: Jean-Pierre Melville's terrific heist film, *Bob le Flambeur* 1955.

ONLY ONE MORE FILM IN THE ALBRIGHT-KNOX'S "SCREENING THE FIFTIES: this Thursday, March 14, it's the best Hollywood musical ever made, Gene Kelly's and Stanley Donen's, *Singin' in the Rain* 1952. Bruce's intro is at 7:30, the film starts a few minutes later. The Garden Restaurant will be open for dinner on screening nights. Call 716.270.8233 for information and reservations)

**NEXT WEEK, MARCH 19, IN THE BUFFALO FILM SEMINARS:** March 19, it's Stanley Kubrick's *Dr. Strangelove or: How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Love the Bomb* 1964. If you thought George C. Scott was terrific in *The Hustler* as the gambler who could only survive on other people's oxygen, wait till you see him as General Buck Turgidson, one of those giddy souls who make the world the scary place anyone sane knows it surely is. Peter Sellers is triply brilliant as a British officer on temporary duty in the office of psychotic SAC General Jack D. Ripper, as U.S. president Merkin Muffley, and as Muffley's teutonic science adviser Dr. Strangelove, whose wooden arm has a life of its own. Selected for the National Film Registry.

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