

John Ford doesn't make pictures about good guys and bad guys; he makes stories about people".

Discuss, with close reference to three John Ford films.

In all of John Ford's films he creates a world where people are neither good nor bad but are complicated. This makes his movies more realistic, because in real life people are rarely completely good or completely bad. It also makes his movies easier to relate to because the main characters all have faults, like real people.

In *My Darling Clementine*, the main character is Wyatt Earp. At first he is revenge-driven and he doesn't care that much about the town. When he is first offered the job of town marshal he turns it down, but then when he discovers his brother has been murdered, he takes the job so that he can get revenge for his brother's death. But early on, we see that his reasons might be a bit more complicated. After he buries his brother he talks at the graveside and says he is going to stay around for a while so that young kids like his brother can grow up safe.

During the film we see Wyatt Earp change. At first he is scruffily dressed and unshaven. But, like the town, he becomes more civilised. He starts to dress in suits and goes to the barber to get his hair cut and to get a shave. John Ford even makes a joke about this. Several times, other characters say they like the smell of the town's air and Wyatt Earp says "no, that's me". At the same time, the town becomes safer, there aren't as many shoot-outs and the town gets its church, another sign of civilization. And at the end *Clementine* says she will stay to start a school. So when Wyatt Earp leaves at the end he has done his job and the town is safe.

When we first see Doc Holliday, we don't get a good impression of him. The only indication that he is a doctor is his name. But the first thing we see is him drinking and gambling and running people out of town. At first it seems that Wyatt Earp and Doc Holliday are not going to be enemies. Doc asks Wyatt if he is in town to take revenge for his brother's death or if he wants to bring peace to the town. When Wyatt says that bringing peace to the town sounds like a good idea, Doc pulls a gun on him. But soon, Doc and Wyatt are working together to keep the peace. We learn that Doc is educated and sensitive. He knows Shakespeare, and when *Clementine* arrives we see that he is also a real doctor. But he is a complicated man; the alcohol and gambling are juxtaposed with his education and his better nature. At the end of the movie, he tries to save Chihuahua's life. After the operation, he feels very good about himself, but when Chihuahua dies he feels horrible and doesn't care about anything any more. He backs up Wyatt at the final shoot out at the OK Corral and dies there.

Clementine is the least complicated character because she is the most perfect. When the man she loves wants to marry another woman she just calmly walks away, after she had been chasing him around the country. Then, she stands by his side and helps as his nurse when he is operating on Chihuahua. We only see one side of her. She would be more interesting if she yelled and screamed and stabbed him with a carving knife. Chihuahua is more of an interesting character because she is not perfect. She helps cheat in gambling by telling what card Wyatt has to another gambler. She gets jealous of Clementine and goes into Clementine's room to mess up her clothes and tries to get her to leave town. But as soon as Doc Holliday leaves, she immediately has another man.

John Ford seems to have a fondness for drunken doctors. In Stagecoach Doc Boone is a drunken doctor, like Doc Holliday, and he also ends up being one of the movie's heroes. Doc Boone gets kicked out of town because he is a drunkard and no one has ever seen him sober. But when he has to deliver Mrs Mallory's baby, he gets sobered up and does a good job of it. He is also very nice to everyone and doesn't treat Dallas, the prostitute, any differently than he treats Mrs Mallory. He helps the romance between Ringo and Dallas by telling Ringo that Dallas is a very nice woman.

At first, we think that Ringo is a criminal because he is an escaped prisoner. But we find out that he is only in trouble with the law because he was trying to get revenge for his brother's death. He and Doc Boone are the only ones that treat Dallas like a lady. Ringo does not care that she is a prostitute at all; he cares about whether she has a good heart.

Mrs Mallory is a more interesting character than Clementine. Like Clementine, she is travelling great distances around the country to reach the man she loves, and when her husband is not there we can see that she is upset. But she is more interesting than Clementine because she shows more emotion, is very brave during the shoot-out and also she changes during the movie. At the beginning, she can only see that Dallas is a prostitute. She refuses to sit next to Dallas and is not very nice to her. But after Dallas stays up all night to help with the baby and look after Mrs Mallory, she sees that Dallas is a good person and offers to do what she can to help Dallas.

Dallas is a prostitute with the heart of gold. At the beginning of the movie she is being kicked out of town by the ladies who want a clean town. Later, we learn that Dallas's parents were massacred and that she had no other option except to be a prostitute. She gets kicked out of town because they want a 'respectable' town, but the reality is that she cares for Mrs Mallory's baby and she is always nice to everyone.

In the Searchers Ethan Edwards is a hate-driven outlaw. He is also a loner. We can tell from the beginning that he is a loner because he arrives at his brother's house alone without any explanation. We know that Ethan has no wife or children and we can also tell that he is in love with his brother's wife Martha. We know this because

when he greets her he gives her a kiss on her forehead, which is a loving gesture, and when he comes back after the hunt and finds out that they have all been killed, the first person he calls out for is Martha.

We know that Ethan is a seasoned gun-fighter. Despite his hatred for Indians he knows all about Comanche beliefs and their way of living. His hatred for Indians keeps him going after his family is killed. He is unwilling to accept Marty, his brother's adopted son, because Marty is part Indian. Ethan is brave and likes to be in control. His family looks up to him and before the Comanche camp his nephew Ben says: "I wish Uncle Ethan was here. Don't you, Ma?" We rarely see Ethan taking other people's feelings into consideration. But we see him trying to keep Lucy's body away from her boyfriend and Martha's body away from Marty, so that the people who are living don't get even more distressed by what they see.

At the end of the movie, the relationship between Ethan and Marty changes. Earlier, Ethan didn't even want to look at Marty. Like Mrs Mallory who didn't want to be anywhere near Dallas at first, Ethan didn't want to be anywhere near Marty because of his Indian blood. But by the end of the movie he realises that Marty is a good and brave person and Ethan respects him for that. In some ways, they are like father and son; Ethan leaves everything he has to Marty in his will. Ethan is also, in the end, able to accept Debbie as his niece even though she has spent so much time with the Indians.

John Ford could have made perfectly good movies about people who were entirely good or entirely bad, but what makes his films stand out is the depth of his characters. As a result, John Ford's movies are still enjoyable, many decades after they were made.

Arianna 8T