

‘John Ford doesn’t make pictures about good guys or bad guys; he makes stories about people’.

Discuss, with close reference to three John Ford films.

In class we watched three films directed by John Ford, a film director and producer. He won four Academy Awards for Best Director in 1935, 1940, 1941, and 1952, and one of his films, How Green Was My Valley won Best Picture. The three films we watched in class were Stagecoach, My darling Clementine, and The Searchers. What I found in common in all of the three films is the search for someone. It is true that John Ford does not make pictures about bad and good guys, but he creates stories with a deeper meaning about each person. In all the John Ford films I saw there are the bad and good, but both sides can find themselves in one person. A person can be bad and good at the same time because he can do bad deeds for a reason and good ones for another.

The first film we watched in class was Stagecoach. The main characters in the movie are: Mrs. Mallory, Dallas, Ringo Kid, Doc Boone, Luke Plummer, Buck, Hatfield, Curley, Peacock, Gatewood, and Lieutenant. In this film most of the characters are good. Mrs. Mallory is a nice person with everyone, but not with Dallas, who is a prostitute. Being a prostitute was a scandal for everyone during the 1930s. Since Dallas was a prostitute, Mrs. Mallory, Hatfield, Gatewood, and Buck do not consider her as they consider everyone else. During the film Mrs. Mallory gives birth, and since she cannot take care of the baby because she is still feeling a bit dizzy, Dallas takes care of the baby. At the end Mrs. Mallory tries to be nice with Dallas for having taken care of her and the new born.

Ringo Kid is a really good person. He obviously does not want to harm anyone but he wants to kill the Plummer Boys because they killed his father and his brother, so he wants to have revenge on them. The only bad people in this film are Luke Plummer and Gatewood. Luke Plummer is bad because he killed Ringo Kid’s father and brother, and he wants to kill Ringo too. Gatewood, the banker, stole a lot of money that the townspeople had deposited and ran away. He escaped by going with all the other people in the stagecoach. The rest of the characters are good but a bit bad inside because they do not treat Dallas as a good person, apart from Ringo Kid who asks her to marry him.

The second film we watched in class is called My Darling Clementine. The main characters in this film are Chihuahua, Doc Holiday, Wyatt Earp, Clementine Carter, Old Man Clanton, Virgil Earp, Morgan Earp, and Mac the barman. They are mostly all good and only slightly bad, with the only really bad guy being Old Man Clanton. He wanted the Earps’ cows so bad that he killed James, the youngest, to get them. When the other three brothers find James dead, and the cows gone, Wyatt, Virgil, and Morgan Earp want to kill the Clanton family. Chihuahua and Doc Holiday are both good and bad as well. Chihuahua is nice with everyone she knows, but when Wyatt Earp comes to Tombstone, she helps another friend cheat to win in poker, and when Wyatt Earp finds out that he is cheated, he pushes her into the horses’ drinking water. For this reason, Chihuahua does not like him. Chihuahua does not like Clementine Carter, either, because she comes back to see Doc Holiday, with whom she is already in love. Since she becomes protective of her partner, she does not like Clementine. Chihuahua does not want anything to do with

Clementine, also because Doc Holiday does not want to see Clementine anymore. For me, the only innocent and good person in the film is Mac the barman. He just works at the bar and does not do anything bad to anyone.

The last film we saw that was directed by John Ford is The Searchers. In The Searchers the bad and good people are both the Indians and the white people. In the film, Ethan, acted by John Wayne, is, once again, both good and bad. At first he wants to find Debbie, his niece, because he wants to save her from a life with the Indians. When he finds her the first time, after five years, he wants to kill her. This is because she became one of the Indians, and Ethan does not want to see that his niece became an Indian. Two years later he finds Debbie again, and instead of killing her he saves her and brings her home where she belongs. Ethan saves Debbie because she is the daughter of Martha, whom Ethan has always loved. Even if Ethan loves Martha a lot, he loves Lucy and Debbie equally; but since it is too late for Martha and Lucy, he wants to save Debbie, because he is sure that she is still alive. So he looks for her with Martin for seven years, and obviously they find her grown up but still the same.

Other characters that have both bad and good personalities are the Indians. The most important Indian in the film is the Indian chief, Scar. He has both sides, but in my opinion he leans more towards the bad. This is because he does lots of bad deeds, like killing a lot of innocent people or sexually harassing the girls. One good deed that he does is that instead of killing Debbie, he brings her home to his family and teaches her how to speak and write in his language. This is what happened to Martha and Lucy as well. The Indian chief does not kill Debbie because she is too small and because this way it is easier to manipulate her into learning their language. Thus, all in all it is not a genuinely good deed he does in taking her with him. For this reason, being that Lucy and Martha were already grown up, it was hard manipulating them, so they got killed.

I really like all three films, but the one I like most is “The Searchers.” One reason is that I like all the actors because they played their parts well, and another reason is that it was made very precisely and I liked the angles which were used to shoot the scenes. The story was captivating as well. The scene I like best is when they find Debbie for the first time and she is so pretty, and a bit later she runs after them and says that she remembers them and tells them to go away. The other scene I really like is when, at the end, Ethan gets Debbie and lifts her up in the air and tells her that she is going home now.



Ethan lifts Debbie, no longer a little girl, into the air. “Let’s go home, Debbie.”