GLORY IN DEFEAT AND RECONCILIATION: THE CONFEDERACY IN THE FILMS OF JOHN FORD

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1. THE TRACES OF THE AMERICAN CIVIL WAR IN THE FILMOGRAPHY OF JOHN FORD

At the beginning of *The Prisoner of Shark Island* (John Ford, 1936), Abraham Lincoln (Frank McGlynn Sr.) steps out wearily onto the balcony of the White House to greet a cheering crowd celebrating the end of the Civil War. Instead of delivering a speech he has not had time to prepare, he asks the band there to play "Dixie". In this way, "Lincoln instinctually attempts to rechannel the duty with which the war was fought into a policy of reconciliation", effectively claiming the unofficial Confederate anthem[1] "for *all* Americans. But other factions instinctually feel that duty demands revenge: Lincoln is assassinated" (Gallagher, 1986: 132). Ford portrays the assassination, carried out by the Southern sympathiser John Wilkes Booth, in the very next sequence. "He was assassinated, but the Union is not assassinated [...]. Death does its work, obliterates a hundred, a thousand—President, general, captain, private—but the nation is immortal," wrote Walt Whitman in "Death of President Lincoln" (1887: 107). Preserving the national unity was Lincoln's chief obsession during the fratricidal conflict that tore the United States in two from 1861 to 1865. The consequences of that obsession were his own assassination and the deaths of 620,000 soldiers on both sides, as well as the emancipation of four million enslaved Black people and the amendment of the Constitution in an effort to consolidate the principles of equality and freedom.

Abraham Lincoln is a recurring figure in John Ford's filmography[2], an oeuvre that takes US history as one of its central concerns. According to Santos Zunzunegui, Ford engages in a "mythic transubstantiation" of his country's history through the exploration of two themes:

> On the one hand, the Westward journey, a primordial odyssey that condenses the whole adventure of a colonisation whose dark underbelly is the elimination of the *Other* who inhabited those lands

> [...]. On the other, the drama of the fracture caused by a civil war of unprecedented violence that pitted a North attuned to democratic values and marked by an economically advanced capitalism against a South struggling to survive by upholding obsolete aristocratic principles through the exploitation of a people (the Black population) who have been relegated to animal status" (2021: 136-137).

Despite their shared origins, language and constitution, profound differences existed between these two regions. "Mid-century Southerners proclaimed themselves to be a superior breed to Northerners, preserving the agrarian way of life on which the republic had been founded at the Revolution and led by a breed of cultivated gentlemen who better resembled the Founding Fathers than the money-grubbing capitalists who dominated public life in the North. The South's poorer classes, too, sons of the soil and outdoorsmen, were held to be superior to their equivalents in the North, whose lives were confined by factory walls and who were often not native-born but immigrants, sometimes not English-speaking, and Catholic rather than Protestant" (Keegan, 2010: 28). Confederate President Jefferson Davis declared that the reason for secession was to defend and protect the rights bequeathed to them by their forebears: the right to own slaves (which after all was not prohibited by law), the freedom to carry their *property* into other territories, and the sovereignty of the states to form a Southern nation. The North, meanwhile, fought for the Union, for democracy and, ultimately, for the emancipation of the slaves (McPherson, 1988).

Historical records speak in equal measure of expressions of goodwill and animosity between Johnny Reb and Billy Yank[3]. "Americans remained American. Accent apart [...], the soldiers of the two sides resembled each other much more than they differed" (Keegan, 2010: 8). Yet it is striking, for example, to note the absence of Confederate graves in the Gettysburg Cemetery, given that the Federal government often dug mass graves to bury rebels who had died on Northern territory (Keegan, 2010: 81). In the South, Andersonville Prison effectively became an extermination centre for Yankee prisoners of war, who died in their thousands from disease or starvation. After the end of the war and Lincoln's assassination, Northerners became seized by suspicion of their Southern neighbours: "the whole of the reconstruction era was clouded by the feeling that these Southerners just were not to be trusted. They were men to be feared, men to be watched, men to be controlled by force, and a bitterness and estrangement flared up that took generations to die down" (Catton, 1986: 102).

Ford was an avid reader of books on the Civil War and possessed a thorough knowledge of its history. However, he directed only two films set explicitly in the period: *The Horse Soldiers* (1959) and the chapter titled "The Civil War" in the anthology film *How the West Was Won* (John Ford, Henry Hathaway and George Marshall, 1962). *The Horse Soldiers* explores the second theme identified by Zunzunegui. Based on the novel by Harold Sinclair, it recounts the raid of Southern territory carried out by three Union cavalry regiments under the command of Colonel Benjamin H. Grierson: who travelled approximately five hundred miles over sixteen days, from La Grange in Tennessee to Baton Rouge, Louisiana, destroying all the railroads, telegraph wires and Confederate supplies they came upon along the way in support of the decisive siege of Vicksburg led by General Ulysses S. Grant in 1863.

The film includes two epic sequences that glorify the spirit of resistance of Southerners. The first of these depicts a death-defying attack launched by a small group of rebels against Colonel Marlowe (John Wayne)—Grierson's alter ego in the film—and his men after they capture the Newton station, the primary objective of the mission. The surprise offensive is orchestrated by Colonel Jonathan Miles (Carleton Young), whose face, shown

ALTHOUGH IT ADOPTS THE POINT OF VIEW OF THE UNION SIDE, *THE HORSE SOLDIERS* INCLUDES TWO EPIC SEQUENCES THAT GLORIFY THE SPIRIT OF RESISTANCE OF SOUTHERNERS

through a windowpane, fuses with the reflection of a train loaded with Confederate soldiers ready to attack Marlowe's regiment (Image 1). The shot composition here is reminiscent of the famous shot in the final sequence of *Fort Apache* (1948) showing the ghostly reflection of the cavalry soldiers cut down by Cochise superimposed over the image of Captain York (John Wayne), who resolves not to reveal Lieutenant Colonel Thursday's (Henry Fonda) culpability for the massacre to the press and shares only the glorious legend of those men who put duty and loyalty to the army above their own lives (Image 2).

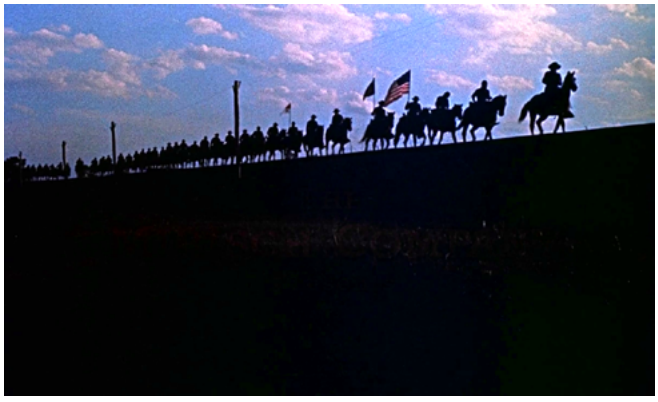
Images 1 and 2





The second sequence—one of the true highlights of the film—shows a corps of underage cadets from the Jefferson Military Academy marching with assurance in perfect formation to confront Marlowe's troops. The low camera angle, enhancing the image of their small figures silhouetted against the sky, recalls the image of the Northern soldiers at the beginning of the film (Images 3 and 4)[4].





Images 3 and 4

Although the film is relatively faithful to historical events, both the sequences described above depict fictitious events; the second sequence does not even appear in John Lee Mahin and Martin Rackin's screenplay, suggesting it was entirely John Ford's creation (York, 2001: 94)[5]. Overall, the film focuses on the dedication and sacrifice of Union soldiers, so these two sequences introduce an apparent contradiction—one that, moreover, runs throughout Ford's oeuvre.

The Horse Soldiers and "The Civil War" chapter in *How the West Was Won* are Ford's only two films that focus directly on the war[6]. Both are aligned with the cause of the North, and in both "the filmmaker's position is critical of the destruction and cruelty that war entails", although "he considers it an indispensable sacrifice to keep the nation united" (Zubiaur, 2026: 269). Yet referencesto the conflict can be found in much of his filmography, which is filled with memorable Confederate characters. This article traces the presence of the American Civil War in Ford's films other than the two aforementioned titles, analysing the portrait this Maine-born filmmaker offers of the opposing side: the defeated Confederates. The working hypothesis is that Ford glorifies certain features of the Southern temperament in order to reinforce the ideas of national unity and reconciliation championed by Abraham Lincoln during his brief yet decisive presidency.

2. THE CONFEDERACY IN FORD'S FILMS

Ford's Confederate characters can be organised into three categories based on their personal traits and situations: redeemed outcasts; Kentucky judges; and Confederates in his Cavalry Trilogy.

2.1. Redeemed outcasts

The protagonist of *The Prisoner of Shark Island*, Samuel Alexander Mudd (Warner Baxter), is the doctor who treated John Wilkes Booth's injured leg when he was on the run after assassinating Lincoln. A victim of the irrational climate of hatred and vengeance that spread across the country in the wake of the president's death, Mudd is sentenced to life imprisonment as an accomplice to murder by a hastily arranged court martial in which even the most basic due process was disregarded. Despite being tortured by his jailers on the Dry Tortugas islands, he ends up saving their lives during an outbreak of yellow fever when he steps in for the prison doctor after his death.

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Mudd's behaviour reflects his status as an honourable Southern man. He assists Booth (Francis McDonald) without knowing his identity and combats an epidemic that is killing his enemies without any promise of reward, guided solely by a sense of duty. He shows concern for the welfare of his slaves, and unlike the Yankees, he knows how to convince some Black soldiers who have mutinied in the fort to return to their posts. In the end, he leads an artillery attack against a government vessel in order to force it to unload the provisions and medicines they so urgently need. His redemption arrives in the form of a presidential pardon.

Historical research has found evidence that the real Samuel Mudd was in fact a member of a clandestine network of Confederate sympathisers through which he met Booth; however, the extent of his involvement in the assassination remains unclear. Thus, *"The Prisoner of Shark Island* perhaps should be approached more for its mythic qualities than for its claims of historical accuracy [...] as an allegory about the need to 'bind up the nation's wounds'" (McBride, 2003: 256).

Other redeemed outcasts appear in two of John Ford's most acclaimed Westerns. The first is without doubt the most memorable of Ford's characters of this kind: the tormented Ethan Edwards (John Wayne) in *The Searchers*, whose background as a Confederate soldier is crucial to understanding his dark and complex personality. Ford is "the filmmaker of what is left unsaid, of what can be seen but cannot be explained" (Viota, 2019: 209), and also of what can be heard. Kathryn Kalinak points out that the choice of musical

ETHAN EDWARDS'S BACKGROUND AS A CONFEDERATE SOLDIER IS CRUCIAL TO UNDERSTANDING HIS DARK AND COMPLEX PERSONALITY

accompaniment for the scene of Ethan's arrival at his brother's ranch at the beginning of the film establishes the character's defeated condition from the outset (2007: 167). His sister-in-law Martha (Dorothy Jordan) opens the door as if anticipating his return, while we hear the strains of J. P. Webster's "Lorena", whose lyrics tell the story of a love affair thwarted by a prohibition. Martha gazes into the distance and glimpses Ethan approaching on horseback, while the tune to "Lorena" gives way to the melody of the Confederate anthem "The Bonnie Blue Flag". As Ethan dismounts and greets his brother, we hear once again the tune to the film's theme song (composed by Stan Jones), which we heard moments earlier over the opening credits with its lyrics asking: "What makes a man to wander? What makes a man to roam?".

The opening caption inserted by Ford, which was not included in Frank S. Nugent's original script, indicates the setting as "Texas, 1868". Texas is a former Confederate state now rocked by a battle for territory between settlers and Native Americans. The South lost the American Civil War three years earlier, yet Ethan still wears his Confederate sabre and greatcoat because he says he doesn't believe in surrendering. He also fought for Emperor Maximilian in Mexico (another lost cause), and now he has returned to a home that is not his own after years of running away from his longing for Martha. "Lorena", a song that was especially popular in the South, alludes to this unconsummated yet requited love, as revealed by the way Martha caresses Ethan's Confederate coat before they part for the last time. It is the same coat that will later serve as a shroud for her daughter Lucy (Pippa Scott).

This emotional wound is "what shapes his character and establishes the analogy that runs throughout the story: while Scar—the Native American chief who rapes, mutilates and murders Martha and her family and takes [his niece] Debbie as his own—derives his name from the scar across his face, Ethan carries an internal scar of his own inside him, as the alter ego of the 'redskin' he pursues relentlessly for nearly seven years" (Zunzunegui, 2016: 43). Ethan does not get the chance to kill Scar himself, but he does scalp his corpse, just as Scar did to Martha. Zunzunegui observes that Ford repeatedly conceals the eyes of the protagonist, a man blinded by hatred and vengeance. When he finally finds Debbie (Natalie Wood), the object of his obsessive search, he lifts her into his arms with the intention of killing her. In this way, he repeats an act we see at the beginning of the film, when he mistakes Debbie for her elder sister, Lucy; now, the tune to "Lorena" accompanies the moment he recognises her as Martha's daughter (2016: 26).

"Ethan's physical search is only a search for himself, to come to terms with his own solitude. And the search will resolve not with the death of Scar [...], but with a transmutation of Ethan's violence, solitude and racism into love, community and (the antonym of racism?) fraternity" (Gallagher, 1986: 408). Ethan takes Debbie back to the Jorgensen ranch, yet he remains outside. His redemption cannot be complete. The actions of this brutal and violent man secure the future of the settlers in Texas through his nephew Martin (Jeffrey Hunter)—who is one-eighth Cherokee—and his niece Debbie, who was raised by the Comanche. But his scars are too deep and his sins too grave for him to enter that civilised world. He must continue to "search his heart and soul".

Hatfield (John Carradine), the gambler in *Stagecoach*, is Ford's other former Confederate soldier who finds redemption—in this case, on a journey through Monument Valley. Spurned by all the respectable establishments and hinted to

have shot a man in the back, he occupies the same social space as other marginalised characters, such as the outlaw Ringo (John Wayne), the prostitute Dallas (Claire Trevor) and the alcoholic doctor Josiah Boone (Thomas Mitchell), who are in fact the most morally upright characters in the film. Yet he is as disdainful and prejudiced towards them as the Virginia belle Lucy Mallory (Louise Platt), under whose father he served in the war and whom he offers to protect on the journey.

At the end of the film, we discover that he is actually the son of an eminent judge named Ringfield, and it may be surmised that as a Southern gentleman, he changed his surname upon becoming a gambler so as not to dishonour his family name. Hatfield fights bravely alongside the other passengers during the Apache attack on the stagecoach, thereby recovering the dignity of his past, but he dies at the very moment he intends to use his last bullet to spare Lucy Mallory the torture—and implied dishonour—of being captured by the Native Americans[7].

Like the protagonist in "The Civil War", Lucy enacts the two movements described by Zunzunegui (North-South and East-West): she marries a Union captain despite her Southern lineage, and she travels out west to join him. She thus embodies the symbolic healing of the wound that has torn the country apart, a wound represented throughout the film by the mutual hostility between the Confederate Hatfield and the Unionist Doc Boone. The nation cannot be rebuilt upon the ideological foundations of the South, and so Hatfield must die while Lucy must survive. She is rescued at the very last moment by the cavalry—a detail that is far from insignificant, as will be discussed below.

2.2. Kentucky judges

Kentucky, the birthplace of both Abraham Lincoln and Jefferson Davis and a border state between the North and the South, was a slave state in 1861. Although its governor declared neutrality in the war, both sides regarded it as part of their respective territories, and Kentuckians enlisted as volunteers in both armies.

John Ford set two films in this contested territory featuring the judge Billy Priest, a character created by Irvin S. Cobb. Both stories, suffused with lyricism and humour, take place in the late 19th and early 20th centuries in Fairfield, a placid, old-fashioned town whose black and white communities coexist in harmony—though not in equality—and where the achievements of the Confederacy are still commemorated.

In *Judge Priest* (1934), Will Rogers portrays a plain-spoken, ironic and astute judge who is more concerned with goodness and justice than with the letter of the law or social conventions, a philosopher of life who challenges class divisions and the intolerance of the community. When the blacksmith Robert Gillis (David Landau), an outsider with a mysterious past, is wrongfully accused of assaulting the town barber, Priest ensures his acquittal with the testimony of Reverend Brand (Henry B. Walthall)[8]. During the trial, the reverend explains that Gillis had been recruited from the prison where he was serving a life sentence to fight in the war, but that he had demonstrated great heroism, rescuing an enemy soldier and even fighting Union artillery single-handedly. The strains of "Dixie", performed by an African American band orchestrated by Priest, accompany the conclusion of his testimony, which culminates in riotous cheers all round and brings the proceedings to an end: no further evidence of Gillis's innocence is required. "Combining a celebration of brotherhood under fire with a shameless manipulation of the jury's Confederate sympathies is the judge's way of

PRIEST A PLAIN-SPOKEN, IRONIC AND ASTUTE JUDGE WHO IS MORE CONCERNED WITH GOODNESS AND JUSTICE THAN WITH THE LETTER OF THE LAW OR SOCIAL CONVENTIONS

bringing the community together while acknowledging and subtly mocking the enduring strength of their prejudices" (McBride, 2003: 211).

During this testimony, flashbacks to the events of the war are superimposed over the image of the reverend, who is positioned in the bottom left corner of the screen. Ford sometimes maintains this off-centre composition even when there are no flashbacks; the empty space is then filled by a portrait hanging on the wall behind him of Thomas J. "Stonewall" Jackson, so nicknamed because his troops held back Union forces like a "stone wall" at the First Battle of Bull Run (1861). Endowed with an aura of invincibility after defeating a numerically superior army in Virginia's Shenandoah Valley (1862) (McPherson, 1988: 460), Jackson became the embodiment of the kind of respect that Priest recognised and sought to command.



Image 5

The picture of "Stonewall" also presides over the Fairfield county courthouse in *The Sun Shines Bright*, Ford's 1953 update to *Judge Priest*. The Billy Priest portrayed by Charles Winninger displays the same humanist attitude as his predecessor, though he is older, more cynical, and more overtly concerned with politics. He is running for re-election against Maydew (Milburn Stone), an arrogant Yankee who wants to do away with the old Southern values—"the doddering relics of a lost cause"—that characterise Priest's approach as a judge. Priest senses the threat posed by the progress advocated by his opponent, yet he cannot help but challenge the intolerance and hypocrisy of his fellow citizens with actions that jeopardise his re-election, such as stopping a mob from lynching a young Black man and leading the procession at the funeral for a prostitute, which he himself officiates.

This funeral constitutes one of the most moving instances of community reconciliation in Ford's filmography. Priest walks alone behind the coffin, accompanied only by the women from the brothel; however, after overcoming their initial astonishment, the town's respectable citizens begin to join him. It is significant that the first to support the judge's defiant gesture is Joe Habersham (Henry O'Neill), the head of the local chapter of the Grand Army of the Republic, the Union veterans' association. In an earlier sequence, the Confederate veterans led by Priest open their meeting by saluting both the Union and Confederate flags. Habersham interrupts the meeting to politely request the return of the flag stolen from his association. Priest solemnly carries the flag to the Grand Army of the Republic headquarters, where Habersham alludes to some tattered Confederate flags that Ford respectfully leaves outside the frame. The whole episode is a stratagem devised by the astute Priest in an attempt to secure votes in otherwise inaccessible quarters, but his message, applauded by the old Yankees, is unequivocally conciliatory: "Those Confederate flags and *our* national standard are what has made this Union great." Priest leaves the place on his own, shrouded in shadow. He pauses beside some old disused cannons and offers an ironic salute to a campaign poster for Maydew. A choir is heard singing the Union song "Tenting on the Old Camp Ground": "Many are the hearts that are weary tonight, wishing for the war to cease. Many are the hearts that are looking for the right to see the dawn of peace."

The community ultimately acknowledges Priest's good judgement by re-electing him, but after the parade held in his honour he disappears into the darkness of his house as if he were walking into the sunset. Priest belongs to a world that is now obsolete.

2.3. Confederates in the Cavalry Trilogy

The films *Fort Apache* (1948), *She Wore a Yellow Ribbon* (1949) and *Rio Grande* (1950) are referred to as the "Cavalry Trilogy", although they were not originally conceived of as such. All three films are based on stories published in *The Saturday Evening Post* by James Warner Bellah, whom McBride describes as "an unreconstructed Southern white supremacist" (2003: 449). Set after the American Civil War during the period of westward expansion, they recount the vicissitudes of cavalry regiments stationed on the frontier.

"Ford's view of the cavalry is not ethnocentric, however, but an acknowledgement of American cultural diversity" (McBride, 2003: 454). That diversity included Confederates. In *Fort Apache*, the Mexican actor Pedro Armendáriz plays a former Confederate soldier, Sergeant Beaufort, who is entrusted with such essential duties as training new recruits and serving as an interpreter for the Native Americans. However, perhaps the most compelling Southern character in the trilogy is Sergeant Tyree (Ben Johnson) in *She Wore a Yellow Ribbon*. The film's protagonist, Captain Nathan Brittles (John Wayne), is an accomplished Union army veteran on the verge of retirement. Abby Allshard (Mildred Natwick), the wife of his superior, nicknames him "Marching Through Georgia", after a song commemorating General William T. Sherman's March to the Sea (1863-1864), a military campaign in which Brittles may have taken part, which devastated Southern states such as Georgia and the Carolinas. Despite this background, the veteran Yankee captain places his trust in the former Confederate soldier Tyree. A swift and skilled horseman, Tyree rides ahead of the column to scout the territory; he sees everything before Brittles does and he is the only subordinate whose opinion the captain seeks, even though Tyree is reluctant to offer it because, he says, his mother "didn't raise any sons to be making guesses before a captain". He is also the only one to accompany Brittles on his final mission—significantly, a peace mission—in which the captain must negotiate with the old Native American chief Pony-That-Walks (Chief John Big Tree) to avert a war desired only by the younger generations. "Tyree is the perfect solitary figure, silhouetted on horseback against the impressionistic skies of *She Wore*.... He is a man who has no need of others, who excludes himself; in this sense, he resembles Ethan. Yet others do need both men. Ford's astuteness lies in embodying such a character in a professional soldier, contrary to the cliché of the army as a space of subjugation. Tyree serves as evidence that a man can be free in any situation" (Viota, 2022: 245-246).

Brittles and Tyree share one of the film's most moving moments in a burial scene, a ritual often featured in Ford's films, which, like all the ceremonies he portrays, serves to reinforce the bonds that unite the community. The stagecoach post at Sudrow's Wells has been torched by Cheyenne warriors, who killed the couple who ran it and mortally wounded a trooper named John Smith (Rudy Bowman), a man too old for such a low rank. As Brittles and Tyree attend him in his final moments, the tune to "Dixie" begins to play, as softly as a lullaby. In his dying breaths, the old soldier addresses Tyree as "captain". The scene that follows clarifies what Ford has already subtly hinted to those attentive enough to have noticed. The regiment gathers at dusk around the coffin of their fallen comrade, shown in a high-angle long shot that has something of a painterly quality (Image 6). Ford then cuts to a medium shot centred on Brittles as he commends to God the soul of Rome Clay, a brigadier general in the Confederate army (Image 7). He then grants Tyree permission







Images 6, 7 and 8

to place upon the coffin a makeshift Confederate flag sewn by the wife of the Union commander Allshard—who says she is "proud to do it"—out of her red petticoats (Image 8). Through a simple yet revealing change of shot, Ford foregrounds the honourable gesture of the Union captain who restores to his former enemy not only his identity ("John Smith" is of course a pseudonym) but also the dignity of his rank.

In *Rio Grande*, Ben Johnson would also play the role of a cavalryman named Tyree, who in this case is a noble young Texan arrested for killing a Yankee soldier who insulted his sister—once again invoking the Southern code of honour. Although he manages to escape, he decides to return to the company to help them rescue children abducted by Apache warriors. The true protagonists of the film, however, are Lieutenant Colonel Kirby Yorke (John Wayne) and his wife Kathleen (Maureen O'Hara), who separated fifteen years earlier after set fire to her family's plantation in the Shenandoah Valley during the American Civil War, on orders from the Union general Philip H. Sheridan[9]. Their son, Jeff (Claude Jarman Jr.), whom Kirby barely knows, has enlisted in the army and has been assigned to his father's regiment. Kathleen arrives at the fort determined to remove her son from a military institution that has already taken her husband from her, but the embers of an enduring love and the strength of familial bonds—between the Yorkes, but also between the members of the cavalry—ultimately lead her to accept defeat. The couple's reconciliation is expressed in a symbolic exchange of objects related to their old hostilities: Kathleen has ironed Kirby's uniform, and he pays her for it with ten Confederate dollars, whose only value lies in the fact that he has preserved them. She, in turn, gives him his change in Union coins—the very coins she had intended to use to pay for Jeff's release from the army—thereby returning their son to Kirby and reuniting the family.

The most significant peace-making gesture, however, occurs between Kathleen and General Philip H. Sheridan (J. Carroll Naish), a Union hero whose victory in the Battle of Cedar Creek constituted "the most notable example of personal bat-

tlefield leadership in the war" (McPherson, 1988: 779): Sheridan rode his horse Rienzi for fifteen miles to rally his troops and counterattack, completely routing Jubal Early's rebel forces. Along with Sherman, he was also among the Union generals most reviled by the Confederates for implementing a brutal scorched-earth policy in the Shenandoah Valley in 1864. In one of his conversations with Kirby, who is still under his command, the general ponders with regret how history will judge his actions in Shenandoah. However, at the end of the film he assuages his doubts and finds redemption through two conciliatory acts: first, he



Image 9

allows the brave Southern soldier Tyree to escape from the sheriff on his swift horse; and second, he orders the band to play "Dixie" during the parade to honour the soldiers who have rescued the kidnapped children. Kirby, long divided between two incompatible allegiances—the Union army and his Confederate wife—now stands between them as a kind of bridge or conduit (Image 9).

Sheridan and Kathleen share an Irish background, and Paulino Viota has suggested that the idea of "Dixie" may have occurred to the general during a serenade performed for him earlier in the film, when the regiment band plays "By the Glenside", a song celebrating the Irish Fenian independence movement. The song was actually composed in 1916, many years after the period depicted in the film. This anachronism, almost certainly deliberate on the part of a filmmaker as knowledgeable about popular music as Ford was, *must* carry a deeper meaning: Sheridan, "moved by the Irish separatists who were so dear to him, may perhaps have come to understand the American separatists he had so despised" (2019: 305).

3. CONCLUSIONS

Sheridan's gesture in *Rio Grande* mirrors Lincoln's in *The Prisoner of Shark Island*, mentioned at the beginning of this article. For Ford, Abraham Lincoln is "the archetypal figure of justice, a man who dispenses legal wisdom with a priestlike humor, charity and tolerance. He is the forefather of the Fordian lineage of folksy, humane judges and politicians that also includes Judge Priest and Mayor Skeffington" (McBride, 2003: 302).

The foundation of the American nation is one of the central themes of Ford's filmography. The two movements identified by Zunzunegui—from East to West and from the North against the South—trace a kind of cross over the American landscape, marking "the ossuary upon which the national project grew, which had its true crucible in those first movements" (2021: 137). Ford had already placed President Lincoln at the centre of this cross in one of his first major films, *The Iron Horse* (1924). The film's final sequence depicts the moment when the Union Pacific and Central Pacific railroads were connected at Promontory Point, Utah, on 10 May 1869, linking the east and west coasts for the first time. This was a project promoted by Lincoln during the war, reflecting his intention to build a shared future for the whole country in an effort to heal the scars left by the war. Lincoln consistently proclaimed that this national project was a "house" that could not stand while it was divided against itself[10], and that a sense of brotherhood and unity among Americans was essential to the nation's progress.

The admiring and redemptive portrayal of Confederate characters in Ford's films is in line with this philosophy of reconciliation. Ford praises Southern soldiers and adherents to the Confederate cause for their loyalty, sense of duty, spirit of freedom and perseverance. Although geography allowed them to pursue a purely defensive strategy, the Southerners "really did believe in their ability to defeat superior numbers of Yankees. [...] Southerners wanted to invade the unseceding states and win victories on their soil, not just oppose Northern advances into the Confederacy" (Keegan, 2010: 83). "It seems probable [...] that, had food been available and if numbers had sufficed, [Confederate General Lee] might well have gone on resisting, as would many of his men" (Keegan, 2010: 347).

That resistance was associated with the feelings that McPherson (1997) suggests compensated for the fear, fatigue and homesickness that affected soldiers on both sides right from the beginning of the war: camaraderie and group cohesion, but above all duty, honour and love for their homeland. These are qualities that Ford assigns particular value; it is no coincidence that the Fordian hero, characterised by his rectitude and sense of justice, feels a duty to support his community and even sacrifice himself for it on a pilgrimage towards redemption (Gallagher, 1986: 496). Moreover, Confederate characters represent another recurring motif in Ford's work: "defeat, failure: the tragedy of it, but also the peculiar glory inherent in it" (Bogdanovich, 1978: 23).

After the war, it was necessary to ease the hostilities between brothers and rebuild the country. In this sense, Ford's work depicts the colonisation of the West "as a space for national expansion and construction", while the vertical axis of the cross described by Zunzunegui is understood as "a scar that at a given moment ran through the social body". The traces of this scar, which mark several of Ford's Southern characters, "must be erased through the reabsorption of one community (in this case, the former Confederate states) into another that was more open and inclusive" (2021: 137). This reabsorption was achieved precisely in the context of the westward expansion that sparked new brutal confrontations, this time with the Native Americans. The spirit of familial community that Ford attributes to the army, and more specifically to the cavalry, provides the ideal context for Yankee and Confederate soldiers to forget their differences, share a sense of loyalty and camaraderie, and fight side by side for a new shared goal.

THE SPIRIT OF FAMILIAL COMMUNITY THAT FORD ATTRIBUTES TO THE CAVALRY PROVIDES THE IDEAL CONTEXT FOR YANKEE AND CONFEDERATE SOLDIERS TO FORGET THEIR DIFFERENCES

At the end of *She Wore a Yellow Ribbon*, when Tyree comes to Brittles—who believes he is already retired—with the notice of his new appointment, Brittles looks at the notice and sees the signatures of the generals who won the war: Ulysses S. Grant, William T. Sherman, and Philip H. Sheridan.[11] "There's three aces for you, boy!" he exclaims. Tyree replies that he kind of wished it had been a full hand, with a fourth ace: Robert E. Lee's signature. Brittles smiles and replies: "Wouldn't have been bad." The two men then ride back to the fort, two indistinguishable silhouettes against the twilight: just two riders crossing the plains of Monument Valley together. ■

NOTES

1 This was despite the fact it had been composed by a Northerner, Daniel Decatur Emmett, a detail that was very much in keeping with Lincoln's unifying ambitions.

2 There are eight Ford films in which the president either physically appears or is referred to: *The Iron Horse* (1924), *Mother Machree* (1927), *Young Mr. Lin-*

coln (1939), *Sergeant Rutledge* (1960), the "The Civil War" chapter in *How the West Was Won* (1962), *The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance* (1962) and *Cheyenne Autumn* (1964).

3 Generic appellations used to designate Confederate rebels and Yankee Unionists, respectively.

4 Both examples reflect Ford's habitual practice, characteristic of poetic language, of establishing symmetries and correspondences between situations, gestures or compositions within a single film or across multiple films, contributing to the overall construction of the productions and enriching his filmography as a whole (Viota, 2022).

5 This sequence was inspired by a real event: the participation of the cadets from the Virginia Military Institute in the Battle of New Market in May 1864, following Grierson's Raid.

6 The limited nature of this material may explain why the subject of the American Civil War has not aroused much interest among Ford scholars.

7 A few moments earlier, Hatfield drapes his cloak over the body of a young white woman assaulted by the Native Americans, just as Ethan will do when he finds his niece.

8 Walthall was the actor who played the "Little Colonel" in *The Birth of a Nation* (D. W. Griffith, 1915).

9 In *The Horse Soldiers*, the Union cavalryman Colonel Marlowe also falls in love with a Southern lady, Hannah Hunter, although the film never clarifies the fate of this romance, whose musical accompaniment is, inevitably, "Lorena". The vicissitudes of the Yorkes' marriage also evoke elements of Ford's own marriage to Mary Smith, whose family's plantation in South Carolina was burnt down by General Sherman's troops.

10 From a speech delivered in 1858 at the Illinois Republican Party Convention.

11 Grant and Sherman appear in *The Horse Soldiers* and "The Civil War", so all three generals mentioned here have a physical presence in Ford's filmography.

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GLORY IN DEFEAT AND RECONCILIATION: THE CONFEDERACY IN THE FILMS OF JOHN FORD

Abstract

John Ford only directed two films set during the American Civil War, and although it was a subject of particular interest to him, the impact of this historical event on his work has received very little scholarly attention. This article traces the presence of the American Civil War in Ford's filmography and, more specifically, analyses the portrayal of Confederate characters, whose ideological perspectives diametrically oppose his own. These characters fall into three categories: redeemed outcasts, Kentucky judges, and Confederates in his Cavalry Trilogy. These characters exhibit a number of the traits that the American filmmaker particularly valued, such as a sense of duty, resilience and honour in defeat. Their relationships with characters who had fought on the Union side, especially in the cavalry films, reveal Ford's affinity with the philosophy of fraternity and reconciliation promulgated by Lincoln during his brief term of office and suggest that the army is an ideal context for implementing it.

Key words

John Ford; American Civil War; Confederacy; Historical Film; Cavalry Trilogy.

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GLORIA EN LA DERROTA Y RECONCILIACIÓN. LA CONFEDERACIÓN EN EL CINE DE JOHN FORD

Resumen

John Ford solo dirigió dos películas ambientadas en la Guerra de Secesión y, aunque es un tema que a él le interesaba particularmente, la impronta de dicho acontecimiento histórico en su obra apenas ha sido estudiada. Este artículo rastrea las huellas de la Guerra Civil en su filmografía y analiza más concretamente el retrato que Ford esbozó de los personajes confederados, contrarios a sus propios postulados ideológicos. Dichos personajes se dividen en tres categorías: los marginados redimidos, los jueces de Kentucky y los confederados de la trilogía de la caballería. Los perfiles de estos personajes muestran algunos de los rasgos que el cineasta norteamericano estimaba especialmente, como el sentido del deber, la resistencia y el honor en la derrota. Las relaciones que mantienen con los personajes del bando de la Unión, especialmente en las películas de la caballería, revelan la afinidad de Ford con la filosofía de fraternidad y reconciliación que Lincoln promulgó durante su breve mandato y señalan al ejército como marco idóneo para desarrollarla.

Palabras clave

John Ford; Guerra de Secesión; Confederación; Cine de historia; Trilogía de la caballería.

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