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Sociology, Women

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Gender Roles in the Work of John Ford: How The Director of Westerns Used Women To Drive a Male Dominated Genre The Western genre has always been a representation of American identity, in that its films reflect societal moods, pop culture, politics, etc. The prototypical Western portrays beautiful open landscapes and heroic, rugged heroes who are set on either conquering or defending them. These iconic actors such as John Wayne, Roy Stewart, Alan Ladd, and Gary Cooper were made famous through being the centerpiece of Western films and series. These heroes and images of the ‘ great American frontier’ stand as metaphor for America itself. Yet, as we closely examine this exciting and adventurous genre of film we see that the hero’s female counterparts are usually underdeveloped and ignored. Western films, especially in the early years of the genre, featured women characters who held little importance to the plot and served as comedic or sexual support to the hero. In this essay I will examine how John Ford, as a Western filmmaker, did not follow the formula of the genre. He played with male characters that were not heroic, but were selfish and cold, and even more interestingly, readjusted the gender roles in his western films so that women were no longer simple characters, but in fact drove the story along and made significant plot-" related decisions. Often women and men were equals in Ford’s work. I will examine how Ford did this, and contemplate why, as well, in three of his western classics. The films we will be taking a close look at are Fort Apache (1948), The Searchers (1956), and The Man

Who Shot Liberty Valance (1962), all of which feature significant female character contributions. Before diving into the work of Ford and how he gave significance to women in the West, it is important to discuss further the attitudes that Western film, and all of Hollywood in the early 2 years, had towards female characters. According to Laura Mulvey, a feminist and film theorist who wrote extensively on the subject, Hollywood uses women in only two ways: “ as erotic objects for the characters within the screen story, and as erotic object for the spectator within the auditorium... She also connotes something the look continually circles around but disavows: her lack of penis, implying a threat of castration and hence unpleasure. " (Mulvey, p. 716-"718) Therefore, women are either sex objects or characters to be feared. According to Mulvey, Hollywood feels female characters shouldn’t be complex, shouldn’t grow and change, and certainly aren’t able to make decisions that change the outcome of the story. All of that should be left to the male heroes. Early Western films followed a strict formula. They featured rugged yet like able heroes from the frontier, and pitted against them was almost always a foreign adversary. He was either a Native American, or more typically a well-"dressed man from the East coast. (Garfield) Women in these early films played very small roles, most fitting into Mulvey’s definition of sex object. They also acted as a power symbol, and the man who possessed the leading woman had all the power, something we will examine in more depth later in this essay. In 1948, John Ford began to change the dynamics between these dominant male characters and

their passive, sexual counterparts when he made Fort Apache. The film starred John Wayne playing captain Kirby York, a prototypical Western hero, who is as rugged as they come as well as a well--"knowledged man of the West stationed at the frontier's Fort Apache. Henry Fonda played opposite of him as Lt Col. Owen Thursday, a prototypical Western villain, because he came from a foreign land with the intent of instilling change. Thirdly, the film starred Shirley Temple as Owen's cute, innocent daughter, Philadelphia Thursday. The story revolves around Owen 3 Thursday's attempts to control the " wild" Apache tribes of the area and send them back to their reservation, usually against the advice of York. All of these story and character dynamics are to be expected when examining a Western film, but it is Ford's portrayal of women, and in fact the number of contributing female characters, that make this classic of the genre stand out. According to film critic Howard Movshovitz, John Ford used a subtle semiotic technique to imply his heroes' opinions of women in his films. " Good women are still; only questionable women travel under their own power, " he says. (Movshovitz, p. 71) By this he means that good-"intending women in Ford's films are always immobile, and the women whom we are to distrust are those that move around freely. As we begin to examine Fort Apache and its female characters, we must keep this in mind. The first female character we meet is Philadelphia Thursday, and we are introduced to her as she is riding inside of a wagon. According to Movshovitz's theory, this means she is good. I would take it a step further and say that we

are being presented an innocent character here, who I think falls in line with Mulvey's theory. Shirley Temple was a sex symbol, and that's also how Philadelphia Thursday looks to us when we meet her. Immediately, she is fawned at by a group of soldiers and flirts with the young Michael O'Rourke. We get a very iconic and telling shot from Ford in the introductory tavern scene, in which Miss Thursday and O'Rourke sit down next to each other and smile, while not looking or speaking to one another. Ford is symbolizing a lot for us here. Obviously he is setting up their future romantic relationship, but he is also foreshadowing for us gender roles of Fort Apache, where both of these characters are headed. As we are to find out, the women in the fort run the show. They are the ones who take care of the everyday business within the fort, while the men train and go off to battle the surrounding Indian tribes, and as I will explain later, the men actually need their women in order to survive. By not allowing 4 O'Rourke to speak in the aforementioned shot, Ford is suggesting that he needs Miss Thursday to initiate the conversation for him. He is already dependent on women, and therefore will quickly fit in once he arrives at the fort. Ford is also presenting to us something about Miss Thursday with this shot, however it is contrast to the character that she eventually becomes. Here, by being quiet, Miss Thursday is conforming to Eastern societal standards and waiting to be courted. Ford is showing us that she is a foreigner and that she is dependent on men, but as soon as she steps foot within the confines of Fort Apache all of this changes. Upon arrival to the fort, O'Rourke pays a

visit to the Thursday residence to drop off his card, and only Miss Thursday is there to receive him. She immediately goes on the offensive and tries to persuade him to admit his romantic intentions towards her. O'Rourke is confused by her forwardness, and needs her to spell it out for him, a job which actually gets turned over to Kirby York who enters the scene about halfway through. Over the course of one night in the fort, Miss Thursday has been transformed into a woman who takes matters into her own hands. Later that day, Miss Thursday decides to fix up her and her father's house, which proves to be our more solid introduction of another important female character in this film, Mrs. Collingwood. It is Mrs. Collingwood, in fact, who makes all of the arrangements for the Thursdays to have furniture and food and even a servant. That night, when Owen Thursday comes home from work and finds his house fixed up he is very surprised, and slightly confused at how it happened. He is openly admitting here that Philadelphia is more capable than he, at least in the matters of the home, because of the fact that she was able to take care of a matter he was not. Male characters do not do this in Western films. The entire genre is built around a macho mindset in which the male hero or villain is the all-"mighty, yet here Ford has decided to give power to Miss Thursday and by association Mrs. Collingwood. It is one of the first instances that Ford shows us 5 how important his female characters are. Without them, we are to assume that the entire fort would have nothing and would therefore collapse. This scene is also significant to note because of what it

foreshadows for later in the film. Owen Thursday and Mrs. Collingwood end up being our too most powerful characters, which I will explain, and through this scene Ford is showing us who deserves this power. This scene allows us the room to be skeptical of Owen Thursday, and believe his poor decision making at the end of the film, because we are led to ask how he is capable of running a fort when he can't even run a house hold. This idea of giving Miss Thursday and Mrs. Collingwood power over men is in contrast to both Mulvey and Movshovitz. These women are in motion, they move about on their own two feet freely and therefore, according to Movshovitz, are questionable. Yet, how can we question them when they are giving such positive contributions to our male heroes? These women are making it possible for the men of the fort to live and defend it. I believe Movshovitz would make the argument that Ford is foreshadowing here, and that the reasons that these women are not to be trusted arrives later in the film. In saying so, he wouldn't be entirely wrong, however, I believe the actions these characters have that can be viewed as disruptive are all positive contributions to the male character's agendas. Looking at Mulvey's statement that women are sex symbols and castrators, the argument can be made in her defense that these women are trying to take the power from the men and therefore are acting in castration. I do not believe this is what is happening, for the same reason that I would disagree with Movshovitz, in that everything Ford's female characters are doing in Apache is to the ultimate benefit of the male characters. Ford even

gives us a visual example of the need of women in the scene between Owen Thursday and his daughter. After he comes home and discovers the furniture, Philadelphia leaves him alone to relax while she goes to make dinner. As soon as she is gone, Owen tries to sit in a 6 chair, but it breaks and he falls to the floor. Philadelphia rushes in and admits she forgot to tell her father to be careful. Here we have a character that Ford has set up to be the main villain being portrayed as a man incapable of doing something as simple as sitting down. He needs his daughter to tell him where he should sit. This is an interesting power to give to Miss Thursday because it gives her control over Owen, in some aspects. Ford is giving her more power, in fact, than our prototypical hero Kirby York who spends the entire film trying to persuade Owen to change his mind or act differently. Even in the face of certain death, York is unable to control Owen, but Miss Thursday is able to through a simple chair. Here Ford is subtly expressing his believe that women can be equal to men, while also setting up the idea that Miss Thursday will be able to get what she wants from Owen later in the film. Once Philadelphia begins to transform into a woman of the fort, i. e. a woman capable of possessing a man's level of power, her courtship with the young O'Rourke changes. Early on in the film, as we recall, we met Miss Thursday as she was silently flirting with him in the tavern. As the film progresses this relationship changes. After the horse riding incident, Owen forbids O'Rourke from seeing his daughter, so Philadelphia takes the situation into her own hands and acts. She

shows up to the places she knows he will be and forces O'Rourke to speak with her. Philadelphia is driving the story along; she is the active character while the man is sitting idle. Mulvey would probably argue that Ford is turning Miss Thursday into the object to be feared here, the castrator, as she is forcing O'Rourke into uncomfortable situations that could potentially get him into trouble with his superiors. Also, Movshovitz would argue that since she is in motion and moving around freely she should not be trusted. I disagree with both of these statements. I think Ford is cutting it off short of castration, much more so than in his later films. Here Philadelphia is forcing contact, but she lets O'Rourke speak as he pleases. She is acting as his support so that he can get what he 7 wants, which is she. It is O'Rourke who proposes marriage and confesses his love for Philadelphia, not the other way around. Also, she never directly disobeys her father, but acts as the support for O'Rourke to do so. By the end of the film O'Rourke achieves what he wants because of Miss Thursday's actions. Without her, he would not grow as a character, therefore proving her importance to the plot and storyline, a still relatively new idea for a Western woman. Philadelphia Thursday is not the only female character that has influence over men's decisions in Fort Apache. In the end of the film, Mrs. Collingwood is told that her husband, who had put in for a transfer to West Point, has been accepted. However, he has already left to fight the Apaches. She is urged to send someone to call him back, but she refuses. It is a pivotal decision; one that ultimately leads to Mr.

Collingwood's death. This is a significant moment in all of Western film history because a woman is determining the fate of a man. In this sequence, Ford shows us that Mrs. Collingwood is actually one of the most powerful characters in the film. We can equate her level of power to Owen Thursday, who is the only other character capable of sending a man to his death. By introducing early on that Mrs. Collingwood and the other women have power within the fort, Ford was giving us symbols of what was to come. It shouldn't be a surprise when Mrs. Collingwood makes her decision, because Ford foreshadowed this information by slowly building the idea that she and the other women keep the fort running. By introducing Mrs. Collingwood as a women capable of running not only her household, but the Thursday's as well, more so than a Owen Thursday himself, it is very easy for us to believe she could handle such a difficult decision. She is either choosing that Mr. Collingwood would rather die fighting than be a coward, or she has made such a choice for him. The severity of the moment is even showcased within the scene itself. None of the other women standing around her can believe her decision, and they actually urge her 8 against it. They are the ' women of the old west' who can't make their own decisions and need a male character to guide them. Mrs. Collingwood is a ' woman of the fort'. She is the same as a man. The idea of female characters driving story lines and causing/forcing decisions from men is one that Ford would continue to embrace in his films. In his 1956 adventure/journey epic The Searchers, he employed very meaningful female characters

who balance out the cast and play an equal if not greater role to the story. John Wayne once again plays the lead hero, a rugged but cold man named Ethan Edwards returning to the West from the Civil War. We are led to believe the war has affected him greatly, as upon his return he treats young Martin Pawley with severe disrespect, something that surprises the young man. Ethan eventually pairs with Martin on an across-"the-"West search for his niece, Debbie, who is kidnapped by a group of murderous Comanche. Ford uses two of his female characters as influence on what causes Ethan's coldness and determination. The first of which is Martha Edwards, Ethan's brother's wife, who, Movshovitz believes, he is clearly in love with. She is the only character who brings out a joyful side of Ethan, besides young Debbie. When Martha is killed by the tribe of Comanche, Ford is symbolizing that a part of Ethan has died, too, and as the film progresses we see he won't get it back. Without Martha, Ethan becomes colder and harder to be around. This female character is important to note because she doesn't fit into the Mulvey model. Martha may be a sex object, or rather an object of love, but she certainly isn't one to the audience. While she does exist to support Ethan in a way similar to Mulvey's arguments, it is her death that allows her to be different. She permanently changes Ethan for the rest of the film by dying. If Martha had survived, even if Debbie had still been kidnapped, the film would've gone a completely different direction. Perhaps Ethan would've never chased after her. Perhaps he would've married Martha and tried to start a new family; one in

which he would be happy. Martha's mere existence determines who Ethan is 9 and who he becomes, and by dying she sets it up for us to believe that Ethan is capable of turning into such a cold-"hearted human being. The next female character that plays a huge part in the story is Debbie. Her kidnapping is what truly begins the main plot of Ford's film. Typically a man vs. man conflict kicks off Western stories. Even in Fort Apache you can make the case that it is Thursday's arrival in conflict to York's presence that sets the story in motion. In The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance (1962), a Ford film I will discuss later on, it is Valance's early introduction against Ransom Stoddard that sets our story in motion. In The Searchers Ford does something very unique, in that he never puts our villain and hero in the same scene against each other until the final act. Instead, it is Debbie who faces off against Scar, and the resulting treachery is left for Ethan to find and chase. Ford is saying something very deliberate about his characters here. By showing us a Debbie vs. Scar scene rather than an Ethan vs. Scar scene he is leaving the idea of whom the protagonist in the film is up to suggestion. I believe, with this scene, Ford is telling us that Debbie is the most important character in the film. She is the only one who gets a clear face-"off against scar; a one-"on-"one. Later Martin and Ethan meet him, but it is with many others present and even when Martin kills Scar it is quick and without any close up coverage. Ford chooses to keep the camera away from any close ups of Martin or Scar so that he can keep us from jumping into the POV of these characters. He wants to keep it

as tightly between Ethan and Debbie as he can. For these reasons I believe we are to feel more that The Searchers is Debbie’s story, as told by Ethan, not Ethan’s story. In making the case that the film belongs to Debbie, her growth as a character and the effects of that growth must be compared to others. Martin Pawley never changes. He is all-"in to find Debbie throughout the entire film. Laurie, the woman in love with Martin, also doesn’t make much of a transformation. By the end of the story she ends up with him, who she’s pined over for 10 years, and except for a quick stint with Charlie McCorry, stays faithful throughout. Ethan Edwards does change as a character. He starts out as a dark, but loving uncle to Debbie and her siblings. Then he turns colder and murderous in his search for Debbie. When he finds Debbie, he hits his low point as he plots to kill her for becoming a Comanche. Then in the end he turns back once more to a loving character when he sees Debbie isn’t as Comanche as he’d thought. All of that, coupled with Ethan's amount of screen time, comprise a strong argument that he is the most important character in the film. I disagree, though. Debbie is the most important character because along with growing herself, she is the reason for every one of Ethan’s character changes. Ethan is loving in the first act because of innocent, young Debbie, and Martha. Then Martha dies, and the only other source of happiness to Ethan, Debbie, is captured. Without Debbie, Ethan has no reason to do anything or be anyone. She gives him purpose to act. She gives Martin purpose, too, as well as the other men in the film, but Ethan is the only character affected solely

by her. This is not an incredibly unique idea in filmmaking or storytelling; making the hero's actions all because of a damsel or maiden. As Bud Boetticher, another known director of Western films once put it: " What counts is what the heroine provokes, or rather what she represents. She is the one, or rather the love or fear she inspires in the hero, or else the concern he feels for her, who makes him act the way he does. In herself the woman has not the slightest importance. " (Mulvey, p. 715) While this may be true for earlier Western films, Boetticher's statement does not apply to The Searchers because Debbie's growth and change as a character affects the film in ways not possible without her. Somewhere along the lines of the second act she becomes the villain. Once they find her and learn she has turned native, Ethan becomes hell bent on killing her and the film switches to be 11 about Ethan's determination to kill her and Debbie's need to survive. It is important to keep in mind that Westerns always end with a hero vs. villain showdown, in which typically the hero wins. Also remember that I've already stated that the only hero vs. villain confrontation that exists with Scar, our only other villain, is with Debbie, and not Ethan. Yet Scar gets killed in a meaningless scene. Therefore, Ford has intended for the climax of the film when Ethan chases down Debbie to act as our climactic showdown. It is the only moment where Ethan squares off against a Comanche, or at least who he believes to be a Comanche. In this scene however, it is difficult to determine who is villain and who is hero. As I've already stated, Debbie transforms into a villain in Ethan's, and thus our, eyes

by accepting the Comanche customs. Yet, a strong case can be made that Ethan becomes our villain , especially if we believe Debbie is the most important character. Ethan becomes very Comanche-"like himself. He is cold and murderous. He even takes Scar's scalp after Martin kills him, completing Ethan's transformation. So with that in mind, the showdown between Ethan and Debbie can be considered as Comanche versus Comanche, or villain versus villain. Yet, if we are to believe that Debbie is the most important character in the film, as I do, then our hero becomes Debbie in this final confrontation scene. She turns Ethan back in to a like able character, something no one else has been able to do. As an audience we want to see her live and for Ethan to get is niece back and for Martin to end up Laurie, etc. Through showing Ethan that she can be his innocent niece once more, Debbie has forced the positive outcome of the film that we all were looking for. She is a female Western hero, a very unusual move by Ford. Whether you want to argue that Debbie is the hero or Ethan, it is hard to argue that Debbie isn't the most important character in The Searchers because of the impact she has on every single male character's decisions, but especially Ethan's. If she hadn't shown she wasn't all-"Comanche at 12 the end, Ethan would've killed her, and according to how Ford has set up his film, and by not providing Ethan with any more characters capable of giving him happiness, that is how Ethan would've been for the rest of his life. Ford foreshadowed how Ethan would turn out by taking away Martha and showing how the loss of someone he loves affects him. Without

Debbie alive to influence Ethan's happiness, he would've lost both women in his life. No other characters are presented as possible replacements, and therefore without these two women he would be stuck being unhappy and cold forever. As Debbie is already such an important character to this film, she becomes equally important in regards to all female characters in comparison when we look at the Mulvey and Movshovitz arguments. Starting with Mulvey, Debbie is never a sex symbol. She is a child in the entire film, and therefore is never presented in a sexual manner. The idea that she has been deflowered by Scar is hinted at, but never strictly stated, and thus I don't believe that is an issue here. I don't believe she can be seen as castrating Ethan, or any other male character, either. The only way that can possibly be applied is if to say that by taking control of the hero vs. villain showdown and appearing in a one-"on-"one with Scar, Debbie is taking power from Ethan. But, I am arguing in this essay that Debbie should be considered the protagonist of the film, and therefore she wouldn't be taking anything from Ethan because as the protagonist in a Western she is expected to meet the villain at some point. To me, Debbie goes beyond both Mulvey, and especially Boetticher, in being a deep and growing character who determines the direction of the entire story. Movshovitz, on the other hand, makes a fairly good point in his argument on movement and women to be trusted. It ties back into whether Debbie is the villain, or the hero, and at which points she becomes such. As Movshovitz states, women in motion are not to be trusted. 13 Well the only time that Debbie is

in motion is when she is running from the Comanche camp (either towards Ethan and Martin, or away from them in fear). Her movement is what leads Ethan, and therefore the audience, to believe she is the villain because she only moves at the times we see her as Comanche. I agree with him here, and will take it a step forward to say that when she stops moving is when she becomes the hero of the story. By becoming still, she is showing Ethan that she can still be a normal girl (by his standards, any way), and is saving her own life. While the two other significant female characters in The Searchers don't contribute as much to the story as Debbie, their purpose is still important to note. Laurie acts as our balance between a radical world where only women drive the story along, and Mulvey's classic Hollywood world where women are sex objects and castrators. Laurie is hell bent on marriage with Martin; it is her whole purpose. She exists to try and persuade him to give up the search for Debbie. So, while her intentions fall into the Mulvey model, her symbolism does not. Effectively, she is trying to keep the heroes of Martin and Ethan from succeeding. I believe that by having Martin tag along with Ethan throughout the film, Ford is saying Ethan needs him. Jeffrey Church, in Recognition and Restlessness in John Ford's The Searchers, writes that " self-" knowledge and freedom cannot be achieved in solitude [in The Searchers] but only in the context of human beings. " (Church, page 47) He goes on to explain how, while Ethan strives to be alone in his search for Debbie he will never succeed as such. It is only with Martin by his side, or amongst other fellow companions,

that he is able to make progress. Yet, if for nothing else, Ethan needs Martin as a decoy in order to kill Futterman and his men. Coming back around to examine Laurie's whole purpose as a character, it must be to stop Martin from continuing, and therefore condemn Ethan's journey. I believe Ford is making a statement 14 about women characters in general here, in that if they are too simplified in their wants and actions they will end up as blockades for the heroes themselves. Women shouldn't be one dimensional characters determined for sex, or marriage, or even to acquire the power of men because that forces them into a role against the hero, in which they become the villain, or at least villainous in part. Debbie is only returned safely after Laurie and Martin get together and she, silently, approves of him joining the battle. Perhaps it is coincidence, but I think Ford is stating Laurie's importance here. She accepts Martin for who he is, as well as the fact that he must rescue Debbie, and with Laurie's silent permission, Martin is able to go to battle and save her. It is another instance where the female character has determined a life, this time of a fellow woman. If Laurie had been able to keep Martin from going with the group of rangers, Debbie would've surely been killed either by Ethan or the Comanche themselves. The final significant female character example that can be pulled from The Searchers is that of Mrs. Jurgenson, Laurie's mother. During the fight scene between Martin and Charlie we see her standing not only amongst the men cheering, but right next to John Wayne. Ford is working some strong symbolism here. By

putting Mrs. Jurgenson directly next to arguably the most iconic cowboy hero of all time, Ford is suggesting her equality to him. Even after Ethan pushes her inside reminding her she is a lady (and that she doesn't match his character significance), she opens the window and re-"engages in the action. Mrs. Jurgenson is another of Ford's representations that men and women are, and should be shown as, equals. So far we have examined the progression of John Ford's female characters through two films. In Fort Apache the women of the fort were set up to be equals to men. In The Searchers, Ford took it a step further and made a female charter, Debbie, the most important character in 15 the film. In both of these examples, however, the end result is what one would expect from a typical Western: the rugged hero, in both cases played by John Wayne, gets what he is after. In Apache he becomes the leader, taking Thursday's place, and in Searchers he gets Debbie home safely. It wasn't until The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance (1962) that Ford would take another step and use a woman character to not only change the outcome of the film, but also change the entire genre moving forward. Westerns were built on many simple ideas, one of which we have already discussed being hero vs. villain. In the early westerns, these characters were easily recognized. Heroes were rugged and from the frontier, they were dirty and wore rancher-"style outfits. The villains were from a different part of the country, often the east, and wore suits. As the genre progressed, villains sometimes took on a look similar to the hero, but the hero never changed. (Johnson) Using Hallie Stoddard,

John Ford flipped this western archetype completely around. In Valance, a lawyer, Ransom Stoddard, from the East coast heads west and is stopped by outlaw Liberty Valance. After getting beaten down, Stoddard winds up in a nearby town that Valance frequents. Stoddard begins a law practice, and encourages the town to stand up to their villain. Hallie works in the town restaurant and is the girlfriend of John Wayne's character, Tom Doniphon. Tom is our prototypical Western hero, he is rugged and tough, and the only man who scares Liberty Valance to any extent. Throughout the film Stoddard and Hallie begin to spend time together. He teaches her how to read and write, while working off a small debt to the restaurant for food and housing. The two characters start a relationship while Doniphon is out roaming the West and par taking in typical cowboy duties. By the end of the film, Hallie has fallen in love with Stoddard and plans to marry him and accompany him to Washington. 16 This is an extremely significant development because of its affect on Tom Doniphon, our hero. Tom is the cowboy of the film. He is the man who keeps Valance in check. By all accords he is who we expect to be triumphant in the end. We expect this because through previous Western films we have been trained to share in the confidence of the cowboy hero, yet in Valance, Ford has used that very confidence to misdirect his audience. All throughout the film, Doniphon engages in activities expected of a cowboy hero. He stands his ground against Valance in public, he rides off into the West to herd cattle, and he embraces the gun-"as--"law western mentality. Yet all of these characteristics work against

him in ways that had never happened before. In this film, Ford decided to give Hallie the power to decide who would be victorious and who would not. From an audience's perspective, we expect it to be Doniphon because we know the classic cowboy type. But Hallie is different from us, and she latches more onto the qualities of the Eastern lawyer Stoddard. Doniphon is too rough for her. He leaves for extended periods of time and she is unsure when, or if, he will return. It is believable that she would need her man to be present and be loving, but here Ford is taking advantage of how Western films have previously set these traits up to be associated with the hero. This idea that Tom Doniphon is not the most sought after character is very difficult for the audience to grasp. Even though it is Doniphon's bullet not Stoddard's that kills Valence in the end, the ultimate heroic action, it doesn't matter. By that time the decision of who wins has already been made by the only character Ford felt it appropriate, Hallie, and she has chosen Stoddard, and in effect, has made a decision that will alter the entire Western genre for good. She becomes one of, if not the, most important character in a Western up to that time because she has allowed what foreigners to the frontier had been trying to do for over half a century: win. She allows the men from the East to finally conquer the frontier. Hallie kills the classic cowboy hero, 17 literally, as we learn that her departure breaks Doniphon's heart. " He was never the same, " is