Two Rode Together

> *Given the overwhelming advantage of being white, in terms of power, privilege and material well being, who counts as white and who doesn't is worth fighting over – fighting to keep people out, to let strategic groups in, fighting to get in.* (Dyer 1997: 52)
>
> *They are waiting. How long, one might vainly ask, are they waiting for Godot? How long until the curtain falls? How long until Godot comes? But even if Godot had come, they would have kept on waiting. "Personally I wouldn't even know him if I saw him," says Vladimir.* (Schweizer 2008: 12-13)

Two Rode Together: the title of John Ford's 1961 film is descriptive of a number of his earlier Westerns (and, indeed, of the genre more broadly), or, at least, of memorable moments within them.[1] One may think of Wyatt Earp (Henry Fonda) and his surviving brother, Morgan (Ward Bond), journeying off home at the end of *My Darling Clementine* (1946), or of Travis Blue (Ben Johnson) and Sandy Owens (Harry Carey Jr) travelling together to sell some ponies when we first encounter them near the start of *Wagon Master* (1950). The image of the Westerner as iconic loner holds far less sway than one may be tempted to assume. The most obvious and sustained reference point for *Two Rode Together* in Ford's work is provided by Ethan Edwards (John Wayne) and Martin Pawley (Jeffrey Hunter) in *The Searchers*, Ford's complex psychological Western of 1956. In both these instances, the men of the films' titles ride off to Comanche camps in order to track down white captives who have, to varying degrees, become assimilated into the Comanche way of life and, at least in some cases, are beyond rescue. In each film a single female captive is sufficiently resilient and untraumatised by her experiences to be able to return, her 'whiteness' restored, though not in everyone's eyes.

The parallels between these two films are reinforced by certain continuities of casting typical of Ford's repeated use across his work of a familiar selection of actors. Most notable is the recurring presence of Henry Brandon as Comanche chief. However, his threatening aspect as Scar in *The Searchers* has been attenuated in the later film and displaced onto another Comanche, Stone Calf (Woody Strode), instead, though even Stone Calf, surprisingly, is never a substantial threat, despite the expectations raised by his aggressive opposition to the less militant chief, Quanah Parker, played by Brandon. Indeed, the obvious references to *The Searchers*, more generally, highlight significant differences between the two films, rather than merely re-treading familiar ground, and we will need to come back to these later. Similarly, passing reminders of other well-known Ford films provide pointed contrasts rather than links. For example, our first view of Marshal Guthrie McCabe (James Stewart) as he lounges in front of the saloon, his chair tilted back and his legs outstretched on the porch railing in front of him, recalls Wyatt Earp's very similar pose in *My Darling Clementine*, his chair also tilted back, with one leg outstretched against a wooden post. However, whereas Earp is a naïve and peaceable figure, McCabe is a cynical and disruptive one, at least initially. Whereas Earp indicates his intention to return to Tombstone, with the implication that he will ultimately settle down with Clementine (Cathy Downs) for good, McCabe will end up leaving town for California with Elena (Linda Cristal), the woman he retrieves from the

Comanches, since the town refuses to accept her back into its midst, justifying McCabe's cynicism yet offering him a chance at redemption and happiness elsewhere.

In this way, the ending of *Two Rode Together* recalls that of *Stagecoach* (1939), Ford's much earlier film from more than two decades before, when the Ringo Kid (John Wayne) and Dallas (Claire Trevor) head off to Mexico together to escape the repressive disapproval of 'civilisation' and its representatives. The key difference here is that it remains unclear how much Ringo knows about Dallas' dubious past: does he simply accept her having been a prostitute or is he genuinely unaware of this? The clues are blatant, at least to us and everyone *except* Ringo, but there is certainly no moment when we see the truth sink in for *him*, so the ambiguity persists right up to the end of the film: is he a complete innocent throughout, or, rather, so complete a gentleman that he withholds any acknowledgment of what he knows? In *Two Rode Together*, McCabe, of course, is neither innocent nor discreet. Like all the other characters, he is fully aware of Elena's life as Stone Calf's 'wife', and he discusses it openly.

Such awareness, and the verbal explicitness that expresses it, are crucial to the film and in marked contrast with the consistent verbal suppressions of *The Searchers*, where characters know much more than they are willing to say. For example, when Brad (Harry Carey Jr) asks Ethan whether Lucy (Pippa Scott) had been raped by the Comanches before she was killed, his words are riddled with lacunae ('Did they…? W…was she…?'), and Ethan angrily refuses to give him answers ('Whaddya want me to do, draw you a picture? Spell it out? Don't ever ask me. As long as you live, don't ever ask me more'). In contrast, McCabe is nastily explicit when telling Marty (Shirley Jones) of her brother's likely fate as a Comanche captive ('And he's taken scalps, white man's scalps. And given the chance, sister, he'd rape you'), while Elena tells the prurient white women at the army post who persist in questioning her exactly what her life with Stone Calf involved.

The insistent blurting out of such material in *Two Rode Together* is blocked in *The Searchers*, circling, as it does, around Ethan's frustrated desire for his brother's wife Martha (Dorothy Jordan) which can never be spoken aloud, but may merely be revealed to attentive viewers in gestures, hesitations and other non-verbal symptoms of the repression at work. This allows for the prevalent Freudian reading of that film which attributes a distorted version of Ethan's desires (both sexual and punitive) to his alter ego, the Comanche chief Scar, who rapes and murders Martha in Ethan's place, a reading encouraged by all the parallels the film makes between Ethan and Scar.

In *Two Rode Together*, there are certainly parallels between McCabe and Stone Calf: the former's observation to Jim Gary (Richard Widmark) – 'You're still giving the orders, huh?' – occurs shortly before Quanah Parker tells Stone Calf, 'I give the orders, not you', and McCabe's remark to Belle that 'I'm gonna beat hell outta you', when she makes offensive comments to Elena, may remind us of Elena's earlier description of Stone Calf as beating her from time to time. Not least, of course, Elena moves from being Stone Calf's woman to being McCabe's, thereby linking the two men through their respective relationships with her, as McCabe kills Stone Calf and takes his place with Elena. However, unlike the parallels between Ethan and Scar, those between McCabe and Stone Calf lead nowhere, except, perhaps, to link them as rebels resistant to the authorities above them, or to muddy any clear-cut affiliation between McCabe and the other white characters in the main settings where they appear: the town of Tascosa, the white encampment and Fort Grant. There is little mileage in developing an argument akin to the standard reading of Scar as Ethan's alter ego, simply because a comparable case of projection would need a similar bedrock of repression to provide its basis. Instead, *Two Rode Together* is concerned in a far less psychologically complex way – but one that is more interesting in sociological terms – with what it means to be white.

The white encampment

The film's opening scenes in Tascosa serve mainly to set the narrative in motion and to introduce the two men of the title: Marshal Guthrie McCabe, lolling about with beer and cigar on the porch outside the saloon, and his more conscientious army pal, Lieutenant Jim Gary, who arrives in town at the head of his men. As the two of them share a beer, a number of two-shots begin to establish the balanced give-and-take of their relationship, reinforced by the banter between them. We cut to a shot of Belle Aragon (Annelle Hayes) with a male employee inside the saloon she runs, as Guthrie and Jim enter in the background, a roulette wheel prominent in the foreground and curtains festooning the whole scene as though it's a theatre onto whose stage the two men enter like a vaudeville double act.

It soon becomes apparent that Belle's longstanding affair with Guthrie is beginning to make him uneasy, as he jokes with Jim at Belle's expense and to Jim's evident amusement (the reason for McCabe's unease to be made clear in the following scene when he indicates to Jim that Belle has matrimony in mind). All this, along with a certain unpleasant hardness in Belle (as well as the information we get, again in the following scene, that McCabe gets 10% of her take, thus reducing their relationship to an unseemly financial deal), makes it obvious that she is not destined to be his wife, since viewers are likely to take James Stewart – if not yet McCabe – as being better than that. It also motivates McCabe to leave town and accompany Jim to Fort Grant, despite some initial reluctance to do so.

We dissolve to a landscape dominated by a shimmering river which the two men approach as they enter the frame on horseback, followed by the rest of the troop. During a conversation between Jim and McCabe, filmed in another two-shot that continues at greater length than previously seen as they sit together by the river, they knowingly overplay their reactions to each other to humorous effect in a deadpan performance of mock sincerity as they talk. As Ronald L. Davis suggests, it's

a scene 'in which their dialogue seemed almost improvised' (1995: 303). It is implied (through Jim seeming to know that Belle carries a stiletto in her garter) that, in addition to the companionship and cigars which they share, the two men may have shared Belle as well (anticipating the later 'sharing' of Elena by Stone Calf and McCabe), though this generates no genuine antagonism between them and McCabe is quick to believe – or to *appear* to believe – Jim's jokey dismissal of his suspicions. From this point onward, Belle's importance is little more than as a negative contrast to the new relationships that develop as the narrative moves on. The journey continues until we dissolve to the encampment of covered wagons in the grounds of Fort Grant.

This is the key setting of the film and the point at which its thematic concerns are suddenly made palpable in the striking disarray of the camp, a setting characterised by a tension between impermanence and a sense of frozen time.

On one hand, normal home life seems to have been turned inside out as women cook and wash clothes in the open air, with bedsteads and other domestic paraphernalia littering the ground between and around the covered wagons, and cattle wandering through. On the other hand, despite the sense this produces of a group of refugees in transit, the wagons are parked and stationary, marking out their fixed territories within the camp, rather than purposefully on the road to any alternative destination. We later see the wagons en route to the Comanche camp, accompanying Jim and McCabe at least part of the way, but we never see them return to the fort, though they are ensconced there again as though they'd never left by the time McCabe and Elena return from their fatal confrontation with Stone Calf. Any travelling they do merely circles back to where they began.

We soon learn that the family members these people search for amongst the Comanches have been gone for years, so their own lives have presumably been put on hold for years as well, frozen in an ongoing state of waiting, a permanent impermanence, though with some intermittent traffic that we hear about but never observe. This contrasts dramatically with the lives of the scattered community of settlers in *The Searchers* which continue to carry on and develop while Ethan and Martin look for Debbie (Natalie Wood). In *Two Rode Together*, on the other hand, there is no visible nation building going on, just endless milling around in a cramped and unsustaining environment. Unsettled and unproductive, at least as far as we can see, these families seem trapped in an endless present from which they turn to the past in hope of recovering their missing wives and children as they once were, as 'white'.

Racial uncertainties

Despite such attempts to turn back time, the white identities of captive family members, apparently so secure in the past, turn out never to have been more than provisional. Racial identity in this film is not so much a matter of skin colour but is, rather, a way of life or, especially in Elena's case, a way of being treated by others: it is not so much an essence, in other words, as an existential process, a becoming (and, thus, potentially an unbecoming). McCabe brutally emphasises the otherness of the captives in his speculative, but accurate enough, speech to Marty about her brother, part of which I quoted earlier: 'He forgot his English. He just grunts Comanche now. Just grunts. And he's killed. And he's taken scalps, white man's scalps.' Further, when Quanah Parker hands Running Wolf (David Kent) over to Jim Gary and McCabe, though we don't yet know he is Marty's brother, the boy himself insists in Comanche, 'I'm no white man,' spitting at Jim, who asks Quanah Parker for confirmation: 'Is he *white*?' Jim also says of Elena, the other captive traded for guns by Quanah Parker, 'Well, that's no white woman. She's a squaw', though McCabe

correctly recognises her as Mexican, pointedly addressing her as 'Señorita'.

Back at the white encampment, Running Wolf, though known to have been a white captive, is nevertheless called 'Comanche' by one man and 'Injun' by another, and, even though Mrs McCandless (Jeanette Nolan) is adamant that he's her son, her delusion on this score undercuts her implied belief in his whiteness (that is, she believes he's white as part of her belief that he's her son, but, in fact, he's *not* her son). As her husband puts it, 'My Mary ain't ever gonna know what's real and what ain't.' Many members of the white families who, like Mrs McCandless, await a missing spouse or child, are either deluded or resigned, like Vladimir in *Waiting For Godot* (as quoted by Harold Schweizer in one of the citations that opens this essay) as he waits for Godot to turn up: 'Personally I wouldn't even know him if I saw him.' For both Vladimir and the waiting families in the film, to continue to wait is to risk not just disappointment but mounting absurdity. The film's white characters are caught up in an endless frustrated attempt to retrieve a lost past of racial certainties that no longer exist: instead, white identities have become hopelessly chaotic, ambiguous and liable to unravel. Misrecognition is rampant.

Further reinforcing the sense of shifting and permeable boundaries between Comanches and whites is the unexpected American accent that Quanah Parker slips into when he talks with Jim and McCabe in his teepee, away from the rest of the Comanches, and other semantically firm boundaries loosen up in practice as well. For example, Marty dresses

in male clothing and tells Jim that, when younger, she prayed to become a boy and continues to do so now, while Hannah Clegg (Mae Marsh), one of the captives who refuses to be rescued, answers Jim's question – 'You'd rather be listed as dead?' – by declaring emphatically, 'I *am* dead' (and McCabe too is wrongly assumed to be dead when he hasn't yet returned from his encounter with Stone Calf). These minor instances of slippage – or wished-for slippage – between being female or male, alive or dead, mirror the much more thematically central erosion between being Comanche or white.

In fact, whiteness has always been a matter of degree, rather than an absolute. In Richard Dyer's words, some whites 'are whiter than others. Latins, the Irish and Jews, for instance, are rather less securely white than Anglos, Teutons and Nordics' (1997: 12). Thus, blue-eyed blondes are 'whiter' than those with darker hair and eyes, and, on the evidence of both *The Searchers* and *Two Rode Together*, they appear to be less likely to recover from the imputed stains of their captivity. Jim Gary, for example, agrees that the dark-haired Running Wolf can be 'rescued' against his will, even in the face of his apparent savagery, but he insists of blonde Freda Knudsen (Regina Carrol) that 'she stays', even though her father, Ole Knudsen (John Qualen), had earlier shown himself to be the most willing to have his lost child restored to him regardless of what she may turn out to have undergone ('She's still my little girl Freda'), and McCabe agrees with Jim in considering her unsalvageable in spite of her father's uncritical acceptance. Of course, Freda's femaleness, and not just her blondeness, differentiates her from Running Wolf and makes her return more disturbing for the two men, though it remains the case that darker women – such as Elena in *Two Rode Together* and Debbie in *The Searchers* – appear to be less susceptible to racial and sexual corruption by their time as captives than 'whiter' ones.[2]

Far less tolerant than Knudsen are the Reverend Henry Clegg (Ford Rainey) and his sons, Ortho (Harry Carey Jr) and Greeley (Ken Curtis), the family of captive Hannah Clegg who, as we've already noted, considers herself dead and unable to be reintroduced into their midst, knowing her family all too well. Clegg ends up acting as judge in Running Wolf's hasty unofficial trial for killing Mrs McCandless after she frees the boy and attempts to cut his Comanche-style braids, and, as presiding judge, he is the one to pronounce sentence on him: the boy is 'to be hanged by the neck until he is dead'. Clegg is thus a vindictive figure of white retribution, while Ortho and Greeley, who share his outlook but lack his patriarchal heft, are seen as objects of ridicule, vying for Marty's affection in joint opposition to Jim Gary's more measured and welcome courtship. After Ortho and Greeley shake Marty's covered wagon to get her to come out, she laughingly throws flour over them both. Their insipid stupidity and the exaggerated

visible whiteness of this floury coating are here intermixed in a parodic moment befitting a film where whiteness is provisional and readily lost. The flour in which the two are dredged provides no more than a thin veneer which can potentially be washed away, like the racial superiority to which the Clegg family's men implicitly lay claim.

So the film's racial underpinnings are more nuanced than may at first appear or than many of the characters are aware. The moment when McCabe first encounters Elena and correctly recognises her as Mexican is an early indication both of McCabe's perspective and that of the film as a whole. In restoring and respecting Elena's Hispanic heritage and its European roots, he refuses the tendency of many of the white characters in the film to ignore such fine distinctions, Elena herself appearing more dignified and respectable than many of those who look down on her. However, if McCabe's position suggests a subtler three-part structure of Anglos, Comanches and Hispanics, it is also the case that numerous emphatic parallels between Elena and Marty, while recognising Elena's dignified Hispanic otherness, nonetheless maintain the fundamental sisterhood of the two women across the cultural divide.

Each woman is first seen on horseback (both of them riding pintos) and with her hair in braids (though Elena's are covered at first). Each dresses in a way deemed inappropriate for the dance they are encouraged to attend by Gary and McCabe respectively, and each turns up wearing one of Marty's dresses (McCabe having told Elena that Marty is 'about the same size' before he goes to borrow the dress on her behalf) and with her hair worn up. If such insistent parallels

signal the physical links between the two women and society's need to normalise them both, the emotional connection is more moving and profound, as when Marty immediately offers Elena friendship on first meeting her at the dance and approaching her in a clear show of support, later putting her arm around Elena and accompanying her when she leaves the dance in distress.

Marty's wholesome decency is partly a component of the persona Shirley Jones brought with her to the role from a run of previous performances in such movie musicals as *Oklahoma* (Fred Zinnemann, 1955), *Carousel* (Henry King, 1956), and *April Love* (Henry Levin, 1957), though she had more recently won an Academy Award for best supporting actress in *Elmer Gantry* (Richard Brooks, 1960), where she played a prostitute. Nevertheless it would be misleading to describe her, as Eugene Archer did in a contemporary review of *Two Rode Together*, as 'a vapid ingenue' (1961).[3] Gallagher, incidentally, calls *Elena* 'one of Ford's most empathetic ingenues' (2017), though presumably not a vapid one, and finds both Elena and Marty 'wide-eyed and trusting': wide-eyed, maybe, but clear-eyed enough as well.

In *Two Rode Together,* each of the two women ends up with the man of her choice, not in a passive embrace of a fate beyond her control, but through an exercise of free will. In rejecting the Clegg brothers, Marty tells Greeley, 'I'll go and come when I please, Mr Clegg, and with whom I please,' and, when McCabe tells Elena to choose between accompanying him to Fort Grant or remaining with Stone Calf, she turns her horse around to go with him, her act of will made even more manifest by his apparent indifference, at least for now.[4] As the two romances blossom, the scene where McCabe first kisses Elena is followed by a scene where Jim and Marty kiss for the first time (at Marty's instigation), reinforcing through the proximity of these paired moments the doubling of the women themselves which, in turn, is bolstered by their shared resilience and their self-determination, at least in matters of the heart.

Imagery

As we saw earlier, the whiteness of the flour with which Marty covers the Clegg brothers provides a fleeting bit of sly symbolism, but much more persistent and significant is the film's recurring imagery of immobilised wheels. An early example of this follows fast on the heels of Ortho and Greeley's flour-dusting when Marty, having chased them away, walks around a bed on the ground outside her wagon, under a sort of awning, with a wheel dominating the right foreground of the frame as two men walk by in the background. Marty opens a chest at the foot of the bed and takes out and plays a music box associated with her brother and happier days together as an intact family in the past. The domestic topsyturveydom, endless waiting and lack of privacy in the camp – the sense of stalled and disordered lives, which was noted earlier – are here anchored both in the image of the stationary wheel and in Marty's circular walk around the bed, as well as in the music box's gear-driven and repetitive tune. Frozen movements and circular or repetitive movements alike reinforce the overwhelming impression of the camp as a place of purgatorial stasis.

Later, after McCabe's unkind words to Marty about her brother's likely fate as a captive, McCabe shouting after her, 'Is that what you want?' as Marty runs away in tears, we cut back to Jim reprimanding McCabe under an archway, with

another wheel dominating the left foreground of the frame, while shadows of branches darken the setting overall. There are more instances of the wheel motif throughout the film, its importance underlined by the prominent placement of wheels within the frame, including the two wheels of a cannon in the foreground of a scene in the quarters of Major Frazer (John McIntire) where Running Wolf has been brought. Here the peculiarity of the cannon's indoor location may further

alert us to its non-naturalistic significance, both in terms of the wheel motif and the way the cannon itself is suggestively aimed at Marty and Mrs McCandless, the two women who will be hurt most terribly by Running Wolf's retrieval from the Comanches. However, the most striking example of a wheel being used to dramatic purpose is the one to which Running Wolf will be tied, his wrist bound to one of the spokes, after being falsely claimed by Mr McCandless (Cliff Lyons) for the sake of his wife, in order to give her the comforting illusion that her son has been restored. The negative connotations of the stationary wheel, here figured as virtually an instrument of torture, are difficult to miss. When Mrs McCandless releases her 'son' and is on the point of cutting off his braids, he kills her with a knife.

The lynching of Running Wolf greases the wheels that can now take the families back home again to a productive life and, certainly in the case of Henry J. Wringle (Willis Bouchey), a financially remunerative one. He'd earlier complained to

McCabe about the impossibility of running a business with the constant camping and decamping involved in the search for his wife's son, whom he'd promised to find before she'd agree to marry him. His deal with McCabe that Wringle would pay him $1000 for *any* boy for his wife to accept as hers and the handshake with which they seal the bargain set up an unpleasant parallel between the two men as practical entrepreneurs who, as Wringle puts it, make their own luck. The linking of money, luck and deal-making takes us back, in turn, to McCabe's relationship with Belle Aragon in Tascosa, near the beginning of the film, and to the film's first prominent stationary wheel in the foreground of the frame: the roulette wheel in Belle's saloon, temporarily out of use before opening hours. The wheel will, of course, resume spinning and making money (including McCabe's 10%) when Belle opens for business each evening.

In a striking moment, when Running Wolf is being dragged away to be hanged and he recognises the music-box tune from his childhood, the word he repeatedly calls out in English – 'Mine! Mine!' – momentarily both restores the white aspect of his identity and links him to the ideology of ownership and accumulation which characterises Wringle, McCabe, and Belle Aragon alike. The wagon wheels whose imminent turning marks an end to the white characters' waiting are simultaneously the wheels of entrepreneurial capitalism which herald this society's future. As Harold Schweizer puts it in his book about waiting:

> The person who waits is out of sync with time, outside of the "moral" and economic community of those whose time is productive and synchronized or whose time need not – in the habit of velocity – be experienced at all. The waiter's enforced passivity expels him from the community of productive citizens; his endurance of time estranges him from the culture of money and speed. (2008: 12)

Now such waiting is at an end. It's back to business as usual.

Elena de la Madriaga

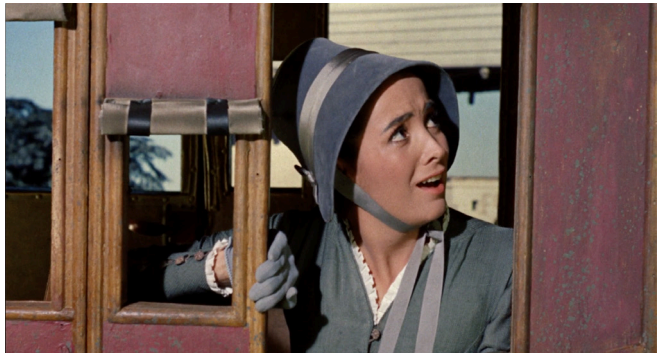
All of this may make *Two Rode Together* sound like a cynical account of the degeneration of the Old West into something far less appealing than the seductive myths – whether primitivist or pastoral – of so many other Westerns. Indeed, 'cynical' is a term that crops up frequently in discussions of this film, for example in J. A. Place's comment that '*Two Rode Together* is Ford's first obviously cynical Western', as cited by Brian Spittles in his own account of Ford (2002: 78). Certainly we are shown a number of characters who are motivated by

money or who are intolerant and prurient towards white captives 'tarnished' by experiences imposed on them against their will. However, there are also characters who take a firm stand against such materialism, racial prejudice and condescension, and the film itself is clearly on their side. McCabe himself may begin as a cynic opting for a life of indolence and easy money, but he is ready to reject this by the end of the film.

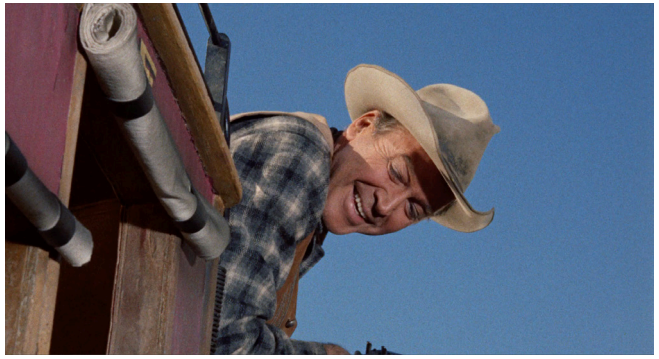
That his former life is only a superficial affectation to be readily sloughed off is made evident when we return to Tascosa near the end of the film. We see a man relaxing outside Belle's saloon, a hat covering his face, in a pose and situation obviously reminding us of McCabe at the start of the film, and wearing almost identical clothes, enticing us to assume that we have come full circle and that McCabe is back where he began. However, the man under the hat turns out to be Ward Corby (Chet Douglas), whom we came across briefly as McCabe's deputy in the earlier sequence in Tascosa, his lightweight and foolish persona recalling the inanity of Ortho and Greeley Clegg. We learn that Ward's clothes are from the same place in San Antonio as those McCabe wore earlier, ordered for Ward by his new fiancée, Belle, and that he has been elected marshal in place of McCabe.

McCabe's playful indignation when faced with Ward's taking his place belies a deeper sense of relief due largely to his growing allegiance to Elena and the sense of purpose and escape she provides. The only genuine anger he displays is in response to Belle's nastily aggressive comment to Elena: 'I know all about you, Mrs Stone Calf.' He is more than happy to relinquish Belle and his sinecure as marshal of Tascosa, and, once he joins Elena on the stagecoach out of town, his affability and smiles return. In this way, McCabe breaks out of a circular reversion to his situation at the start of the film and heads out in a new direction, with Elena's own imminent departure for California providing the catalyst for his decision to make a fresh start with her.

I think it is important to the effect produced by the film's ending that Elena decides on the move to California prior to and independent of McCabe's decision to accompany her, a further example of Elena's strength and self-reliance. However, unlike Laurie (Vera Miles) in *The Searchers*, whose refusal to wait for Martin nearly leads to her marrying the wrong man, Elena's refusal to wait ends up bringing her the right one. It also counteracts a certain complacency in McCabe. This over-confidence in his own point of view had earlier shown itself in his well-intentioned attempts to help her when she is confronted with the hostility of the men and women at Fort Grant. Having advised her to get rid of her Comanche-style braids (thus aligning himself with the unfortunate Mrs McCandless who was killed when on the verge of cutting off Running Wolf's braids) and to dress more suitably in one of Marty's dresses, he takes her to the dance at the army post, but these superficial changes to her appearance do little to remove the perceived blemishes of her time with the Comanches amongst the army men and women who snub or confront her.



Explaining why she hadn't committed suicide rather than live as Stone Calf's woman, Elena begins to speak but is unable to continue, and McCabe turns on her inquisitors, completing the answer for her: she didn't kill herself 'because her religion forbids it'. This is a moment that strikes me as remarkably presumptuous, if well meant, on McCabe's part, and it is unmotivated by anything we have heard Elena tell him previously. Elena is far enough away to make it difficult to read her reaction accurately: we merely see her looking quickly up at McCabe, then lowering her gaze and walking outside, away from the camera, with Marty's arm around her. McCabe follows up his explanation by saying that Elena had asked him, that afternoon, to take her back to the Comanches 'because she was treated much better by [them] than she's been treated by some of you'. This sits uneasily with his assertion that, if not



for her religion, she would have killed herself rather than live amongst the Comanches.

Is it not possible that Elena refuses suicide not because of her religion but because, unlike the other captives, she is neither left adrift – as good as dead, like Hannah Clegg – when the mainstays of her white identity are taken from her nor does she embrace a new Comanche identity to the exclusion of anything else, as Running Wolf has done? Perhaps Elena alone is able to reconcile her experiences amongst the Comanches with her previous life because she is both fully grown when captured and less than wholly 'white'. She also has no family waiting for her to come back to them exactly as she was before. Elena therefore doesn't experience her captivity as a trauma: rather than her white and Comanche experiences being irreconcilably at odds, her clear-sighted attitude to captivity may allow her to integrate them in a single coherent identity. McCabe may not fully grasp much of this, though he nevertheless shares Elena's refusal to believe that her captivity is cause for shame. In time McCabe may even come to realise that Elena has saved him as much as he has saved her.

Jim Gary utters the last line of dialogue in the film, after Belle comments on how little she'd understood McCabe after all: 'Yeah. Well, guess old Guth finally found something he wanted more than 10% of.' In place of the roulette wheel in Belle's saloon that is part of a money-spinning set-up from whose profits McCabe could have benefited, he chooses another sort of gamble detached from the prospect of effortless financial gain, as the stagecoach wheels start turning to take him and Elena out of town. The open-endedness of their

future life together is nicely captured by the dangling preposition that ends Jim's remark to Belle, a fitting and uncynical conclusion to the film as a whole.

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1 Or, indeed, of competing moments within the same film: Tag Gallagher suggests that 'it is not clear even to whom the title's "Two" refers' (1986: 376). Although Jim Gary tells McCabe, when the latter catches up with him on the way to the Comanche camp, "From now on we ride together", there is an equally telling moment, described by Gallagher (2017) in his video essay on the film, when Elena chooses to ride back to Fort Grant with McCabe rather than remaining with Stone Calf and the Comanches, and Ford 'lingers lovingly on her hesitation, her turning her horse', and, of course, Elena and McCabe ride off together on the stagecoach at the end of the film.

2 Douglas Pye has also discussed the symbolic significance of hair colour in a Ford film, focussing on Debbie in *The Searchers* in his essay, 'Double Vision: Miscegenation and Point of View in *The Searchers'* (1996: 234).

3 The phrase could more fittingly be applied to another Ford heroine, Philadelphia Thursday in *Fort Apache* (1948), portrayed by Shirley Temple when not quite out of her teens. Jones herself remarks that, 'Although I was named Shirley after the saccharine child star Shirley Temple, I've always been far more full of spice than of sugar' (2013: 5): here she seems to be talking about herself rather than her film persona, though the comment seems relevant to both.

4 Marty's rejection of Greeley provides another contrast with *The Searchers* where Laurie nearly marries the ludicrously ill-suited Charlie McCorry, played (like Greeley) by Ken Curtis, a misstep only averted when Martin Pawley – the actual object of her desire – turns up fortuitously and in the nick of time. In the same film, Marty's namesake Martha is not as lucky as Laurie and has long ago settled for second-best. Intriguingly, Marty not only shares her given name with Martha, but she also shares her nickname with Martin Pawley, and her comment to Greeley that she'll 'go and come when I please' may remind us of Martin's comings and goings throughout *The Searchers*. So *The Searchers'* women are much more the victims of circumstance rather than agents of their own desires, in contrast to Marty and Elena once they have left their past sufferings behind them.