

## **John Ford's Personality and directing style (Taken from Wikipedia Article)**

### **Personality**

Ford was renowned for his intense personality and his many idiosyncrasies and eccentricities. From the early Thirties onwards, he always wore dark glasses and a patch over his left eye, which was only partly to protect his poor eyesight. He was an inveterate pipe-smoker and while he was shooting he would chew on a linen handkerchief—each morning his wife would give him a dozen fresh handkerchiefs, but by the end of a day's filming the corners of all of them would be chewed to shreds. He always had music played on the set and would routinely break for tea (Earl Grey) at mid-afternoon every day during filming. He discouraged chatter and disliked bad language on set; its use, especially in front of a woman, would typically result in the offender being thrown off the production. He rarely drank during the making of a film, but when a production wrapped he would often lock himself in his study, wrapped only in a sheet, and go on a solitary drinking binge for several days, followed by routine contrition and a vow never to drink again. He was extremely sensitive to criticism and was always particularly angered by any comparison between his work and that of his older brother Francis. He rarely attended premieres or award ceremonies, although his Oscars and other awards were proudly displayed on the mantle in his home.

He was famously untidy, and his study was always littered with books, papers and clothes. He bought a brand new Rolls-Royce in the 1930s, but never rode in it because his wife Mary would not let him smoke in it. His own car, a battered Ford roadster, was so dilapidated and messy that he was once late for a studio meeting because the guard at the studio gate did not believe that the real John Ford would drive such a car, and refused to let him in. He was also notorious for his antipathy towards studio executives: on one early film for Fox he is said to have ordered a guard to keep studio boss Darryl F. Zanuck off the set, and on another occasion he brought an executive in front of the crew, stood him in profile and announced, "This is an associate producer—take a good look because you won't be seeing him on this picture again". His pride and joy was his yacht, *Araner* (yacht), which he bought in 1934 and on which he lavished hundreds of thousands of dollars in repairs and improvements over the years; it became his chief retreat between films and a meeting place for his circle of close friends, including John Wayne and Ward Bond.

Ford was highly intelligent, erudite, sensitive and sentimental, but to protect himself in the cutthroat atmosphere of Hollywood he cultivated the image of a "tough, two-fisted, hard-drinking Irish sonofabitch". One famous event, witnessed by Ford's friend actor Frank Baker, strikingly illustrates the tension between the public persona and the private man. During the Depression, Ford—by then a very wealthy man—was accosted outside his office by a former Universal actor who was destitute and needed \$200 for an operation for his wife. As the man related his misfortunes, Ford appeared to become enraged and then, to the horror of onlookers, he launched himself at the man, knocked him to the floor and shouted "How dare

you come here like this? Who do think you are to talk to me this way?" before storming out of the room. However, as the shaken old man left the building, Frank Baker saw Ford's business manager Fred Totman meet him at the door, where he handed the man a cheque for \$1,000 and instructed Ford's chauffeur to drive him home. There, an ambulance was waiting to take the man's wife to the hospital where a specialist, flown in from San Francisco at Ford's expense, performed the operation. Some time later, Ford purchased a house for the couple and pensioned them for life. When Baker related the story to Francis Ford, he declared it the key to his brother's personality:

Any moment, if that old actor had kept talking, people would have realized what a softy Jack is. He couldn't have stood through that sad story without breaking down. He's built this whole legend of toughness around himself to protect his softness.

Although Ford had many affairs with women, there were occasional rumors about his sexual preferences. In her 2004 autobiography *'Tis Herself*, Maureen O'Hara recalled seeing Ford kissing a famous male actor (whom she did not name) in his office at Columbia Studios.

## **General style**

Ford had many distinctive stylistic 'trademarks' and a suite of thematic preoccupations and visual and aural motifs recurs throughout his work as a director. Film journalist Ephraim Katz summarized some of the keynote features of Ford's work in his Collins Film Encyclopedia entry:

Of all American directors, Ford probably had the clearest personal vision and the most consistent visual style. His ideas and his characters are, like many things branded "American", deceptively simple. His heroes .... may appear simply to be loners, outsiders to established society, who generally speak through action rather than words. But their conflict with society embodies larger themes in the American experience. Ford's films, particularly the Westerns, express a deep aesthetic sensibility for the American past and the spirit of the frontier ... his compositions have a classic strength in which masses of people and their natural surroundings are beautifully juxtaposed, often in breathtaking long shots. The movement of men and horses in his Westerns has rarely been surpassed for regal serenity and evocative power. The musical score, often variations on folk themes, plays a more important part than dialogue in many Ford films. Ford also championed the value and force of the group, as evidenced in his many military dramas ... (he) expressed a similar sentiment for camaraderie through his repeated use of certain actors in the lead and supporting roles ... he also felt an allegiance to places ...

In contrast to his contemporary Alfred Hitchcock, Ford never used storyboards, composing his pictures entirely in his head, without any written or graphic outline of the shots he would use. Script development could be intense but, once approved, his screenplays were rarely rewritten; he was also one of the first filmmakers to encourage his writers and actors to prepare a full back story for their characters. He hated long expository scenes and was famous for tearing

pages out of a script to cut dialogue. During the making of *Mogambo*, when challenged by the film's producer Sam Zimbalist about falling three days behind schedule, Ford responded by tearing three pages out of the script and declaring "We're on schedule" and indeed he never filmed those pages. While making *Drums Along the Mohawk*, Ford neatly sidestepped the challenge of shooting a large and expensive battle scene—he had Henry Fonda improvise a monologue while firing questions from behind the camera about the course of the battle (a subject on which Fonda was well-versed) and then simply editing out the questions.

He was relatively sparing in his use of camera movements and close-ups, preferring static medium or long shots, with his players framed against dramatic vistas or interiors lit in an Expressionistic style, although he often used panning shots and sometimes used a dramatic dolly in (e.g. John Wayne's first appearance in *Stagecoach*). Ford is justly famous for his exciting tracking shots, such as the Apache chase sequence in *Stagecoach* or the attack on the Comanche camp in *The Searchers*.

Recurring visual motifs include trains and wagons—many Ford films begin and end with a linking vehicle such as a train or wagon arriving and leaving—doorways, roads, flowers, rivers, gatherings (parades, dances, meetings, bar scenes, etc.); he also employed gestural motifs in many films, notably the throwing of objects and the lighting of lamps, matches or cigarettes.[72] If a doomed character was shown playing poker (such as Liberty Valance or gunman Tom Tyler in *Stagecoach*), the last hand he plays is the "death hand"—two eights and two aces, one of them the ace of spades—so-called because Wild Bill Hickok is said to have held this hand when he was murdered. Many of his sound films include renditions or quotations of his favorite hymn, "Shall We Gather at the River?", such as its parodic use to underscore the opening scenes of *Stagecoach*, when the prostitute Dallas is being run out of town by local matrons. Character names also recur in many Ford films—the name Quincannon, for example, is used in several films including *The Lost Patrol*, *Rio Grande*, *She Wore A Yellow Ribbon* and *Fort Apache*.

Recent works about Ford's depictions of Native Americans have argued that contrary to popular belief, his Indian characters spanned a range of hostile to sympathetic images from *The Iron Horse* to *Cheyenne Autumn*. His depiction of the Navajo in *Wagon Master* included their characters speaking the Navajo language. The distinguishing mark of Ford's Indian-themed Westerns is that his Native characters always remained separate and apart from white society.

Ford was legendary for his discipline and efficiency on-set[74] and was notorious for being extremely tough on his actors, frequently mocking, yelling and bullying them; he was also infamous for his sometimes sadistic practical jokes. Any actor foolish enough to demand star treatment would receive the full force of his relentless scorn and sarcasm. He once referred to John Wayne as a "big idiot" and even punched Henry Fonda. Henry Brandon (who played Chief Scar from *The Searchers*) once referred to Ford as "the only man who could make John Wayne cry".[citation needed]. He likewise belittled Victor McLaglen, on one occasion reportedly bellowing through the megaphone: "D'ya known, McLaglen, that Fox are paying you \$1200 a week to do things that I could get any child off the street to do better?" *Stock Company*

veteran Ward Bond was reportedly one of the few actors who were impervious to Ford's taunting and sarcasms. Sir Donald Sinden, then a contract star for the Rank Organisation at Pinewood Studios when he starred in *Mogambo*, was not the only person to suffer at the hands of John Ford's notorious behaviour. He recalls "Ten White Hunters were seconded to our unit for our protection and to provide fresh meat. Among them was Marcus, Lord Wallscourt, a delightful man whom Ford treated abysmally—sometimes very sadistically. In Ford's eyes the poor man could do nothing right and was continually being bawled out in front of the entire unit (in some ways he occasionally took the heat off me). None of us could understand the reason for this appalling treatment, which the dear kind man in no way deserved. He himself was quite at a loss. Several weeks later we discovered the cause from Ford's brother-in-law: before emigrating to America, Ford's grandfather had been a labourer on the estate in Ireland of the then Lord Wallscourt: Ford was now getting his own back at his descendant. Not a charming sight." "We now had to return to the MGM-British Studios in London to shoot all the interior scenes. Someone must have pointed out to Ford that he had been thoroughly foul to me during the entire location shoot and when I arrived for my first day's work, I found that he had caused a large notice to be painted at the entrance to our sound stage in capital letters reading BE KIND TO DONALD WEEK. He was as good as his word—for precisely seven days. On the eighth day he ripped the sign down and returned to his normal bullying behaviour."

Ford usually gave his actors little explicit direction, although on occasion he would casually walk through a scene himself, and actors were expected to note every subtle action or mannerism; if they did not, Ford would make them repeat the scene until they got it right, and he would often berate and belittle those who failed to achieve his desired performance. On *The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance*, Ford ran through a scene with Edmond O'Brien and ended by drooping his hand over a railing. O'Brien noticed this but deliberately ignored it, placing his hand on the railing instead; Ford would not explicitly correct him and he reportedly made O'Brien play the scene forty-two times before the actor relented and did it Ford's way.

Despite his often difficult and demanding personality, many actors who worked with Ford acknowledged that he brought out the best in them. John Wayne remarked that "Nobody could handle actors and crew like Jack." and Dobe Carey stated that "He had a quality that made everyone almost kill themselves to please him. Upon arriving on the set, you would feel right away that something special was going to happen. You would feel spiritually awakened all of a sudden." Carey credits Ford with the inspiration of Carey's final film, *Comanche Stallion* (2005).

Ford's favorite location for his Western films was southern Utah's Monument Valley. Although not generally appropriate geographically as a setting for his plots, the expressive visual impact of the area enabled Ford to define images of the American West with some of the most beautiful and powerful cinematography ever shot, in such films as *Stagecoach*, *The Searchers*, *Fort Apache*. A notable example is the famous scene in *She Wore a Yellow Ribbon* in which the cavalry troop is photographed against an oncoming storm. The influence on the films of classic Western artists such as Frederic Remington and others has been examined.[80] Ford's evocative use of the territory for his Westerns has defined the images of the American West so

powerfully that Orson Welles once said that other film-makers refused to shoot in the region out of fears of plagiarism.

Ford typically shot only the footage he needed and often filmed in sequence, minimizing the job of his film editors. In the opinion of Joseph McBride,[83] Ford's technique of cutting in the camera enabled him to retain creative control in a period where directors often had little say on the final editing of their films. Ford noted:

I don't give 'em a lot of film to play with. In fact, Eastman used to complain that I exposed so little film. I do cut in the camera. Otherwise, if you give them a lot of film 'the committee' takes over. They start juggling scenes around and taking out this and putting in that. They can't do it with my pictures. I cut in the camera and that's it. There's not a lot of film left on the floor when I'm finished.