
The Searchers Movie Review

The Searchers is one of those movies that leaves the spectators jaw dropped from the beginning to the end. There is no way to not appreciate this movie. This is a saga of cowboys, with beautiful and almost unbelievable photography, filmed at an astonishing location in Monument Valley - Arizona and Utah, a place that western mythology in cinema editioned in the popular imaginary as the typical landscape of the genre.

John Ford was able to exploit this aspect in its entirety by working with Technicolor and VistaVision technology to capture as much of the environment as possible in general plans that demonstrate the magnificence of the Nature over Man and the impossibility of taming it. It is perfectly possible to say that, within its genre, The Searchers is the most beautiful film, one that could be appreciated only by its visual, completely forgetting the history.

Not that the story is uninteresting, far from it, but the script of the then veteran Frank S. Nugent, proposes to put Man in his position of insignificance before his environment. In addition, the theme of solitude, which surrounds the character Ethan Edwards, embodied in perfection by John Wayne, helps this goal and creates a kind of "despair of silence" even in the sequences in which he interacts with his peers.

Although the story was not based on facts, Nugent's script, taken from Alan Le May's homonymous work, appears to have been influenced by a famous royal case in 1836, in which a nine-year-old girl was abducted by the Indians of the tribe Comanche, having lived among them for 24 years, marrying and having children with Chief Quanah Park until being rescued by a Texas Ranger against their will. This case is particularly interesting because it has been substantially repeated in the film, including the sequence of attack on the Comanche tribe, although it is only one of dozens of similar cases occurred around the same time.

The story is already evident, Debbie (interpreted as a child by Lana Wood and later by the beautiful Natalie Wood is kidnapped from her parents' farm soon after the return of her uncle Ethan Edwards, who returns from the Civil War and the Revolutionary War Mexican. From there, the film is a long search for years by the girl, undertaken by Ethan, who never gives up his goal of finding it. However, this seemingly straight line includes the death of his family and the abduction, in fact, of his two nieces, only for him to find the body of one of them in an indigenous encampment. There is a familiar tension between Ethan's ruthlessness and the delicacy of Martha (Dorothy Jordan), his brother's wife, who implies a passion between them that is never carried out.

Further, what starts with a hunt becomes something more, much more sinister. As the years go by, Ethan no longer has any doubts that the girl has been assimilated by the indigenous culture and her goal is in fact the murder of the young woman, for he does not support the idea of having a white girl of his family among the terrible Indians, more specifically with the tribe of the chief Scar, lived by Henry Brandon, white actor living a native. Thus, the hero of two wars gains much denser contours and John Wayne carries that density in his interpretation, perhaps the best of his career. In fact, Martin's constant but silent presence (Jeffrey Hunter), his nephew who accompanies him in the pursuit of years, works precisely to contrast personalities and to

put Ethan's prejudice in check. It is that Martin is 1/8 of indigenous descent and he is jovial, with cheerful personality that stiffens over time, but never to the point of equating to Ethan.

It is precisely through this awareness of the script about the personality of Ethan that this work of Ford cannot be called, in any way, of prejudice. It only depicts a time, a type of reasoning explained (not justified, of course) by the years of conflict between invading whites and redskins. And this aspect works on both sides, for the natives in *Traces of Hate* are not only painted as pure soul beings who live in harmony with the massacring - but beautiful, beautiful - nature all around. We see evil natives as we see good natives in an efficient attempt to create balance in the script. Even the ending, which does not forgive Ethan and makes us suffer for him, however tough and unpleasant it may be, has this critical purpose.

If this is a flaw in this movie, it would be the inclusion of a parallel narrative about Martin's novel with Laurie (Vera Miles, who would do *Psycho*). There is a romance, letters exchanged during the years when Martin is away, an almost marriage and so on. It's kind of comic relief for a heavy tape, but it does not work and, at certain times, drags it a lot.

John Wayne's performance, John Ford's direction, and Winton C. Hoch's overwhelming photograph, as well as the main narrative, make this film essential in the classic video library of any movie buff.

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