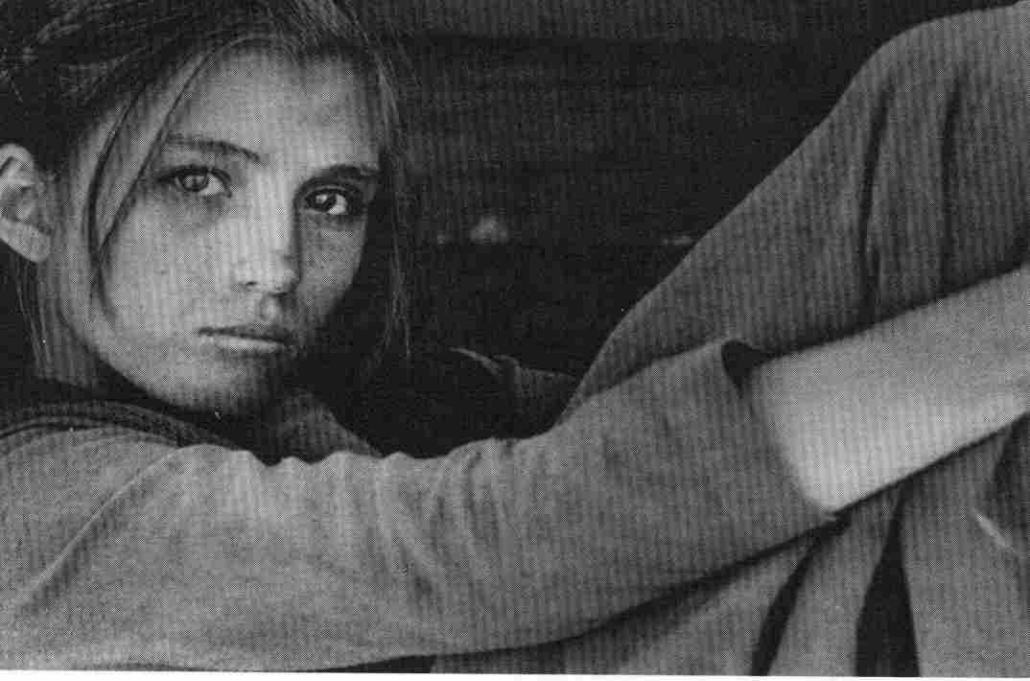

"'God Don't Even Hear You,' or Paradise Lost: Terrence Malick's *Days of Heaven*"

Terrence Malick's odd career—three astonishing features, a handful of screenplays—and a 20-year hiatus from filmmaking—has not, somehow, diminished the lustre of Malick's reputation. After so long an absence from the Hollywood scene—a mysterious absence riven with rumors, musings, and speculations on the director's whereabouts, activities, psychological and spiritual status—Malick has managed, in spite of the paucity of his output, to maintain his stature as a brilliant, if difficult and perfectionistic, genius. The mystery, like that of the late Stanley Kubrick, has only enhanced the interest in Malick's life and work. The director's return to active filmmaking with the extraordinary film *The Thin Red Line* was preceded by a heated courtship by the Hollywood establishment; only Malick could insist and *get* Kevin Costner to read for one of the many projects, (correctly or incorrectly) linked with his name. Yet, unlike Kubrick, there has been little critical discourse surrounding Malick's films—one of those imponderables that add a further layer of obfuscation to the director's career.

Even more so than *Badlands, Days of Heaven* (1978), while something of a cult item, has found little currency among film scholars. Yet it is of a piece with some of the most crucial films emerging from Hollywood in the late 60s and 70s. It shares the post-Vietnam, post-Watergate apocalyptic vision of films like *Taxi Driver, Bonnie and Clyde, The Wild Bunch, Straw Dogs,* and *Apocalypse Now*, and other works of that period which chronicle the loss of American innocence. Unlike those films, *Days of Heaven* fared poorly at the box office, and I would posit several reasons for the film's failure to engage a mass audience. There is

an overt avoidance of empathetic characterizations; the characters are resolutely apyschological, and address one another in deliberately oblique, ambiguous sallies. The plot is deceptively simple and unadorned: a love triangle that ends in tragedy. The film—in a sense—is neither character nor plot driven. At times it chooses to dwell on the "thingness" of the world, *à la nouvelle roman*. Further, it is a film, perhaps even more so than contemporaneous works, that fuses a variety of generic traits—it is in equal parts a western, romance, and melodrama—suggesting a lack of clarity and focus, and hence a liability in the marketplace. The film, photographed by Nestor Alemendros and Haskell Wexler, has a pictorialism, recalling at different moments the works of Corot, Millet, Seurat, Breughel, Turner, and Murnau's American films. This might be considered a virtue in an "art" film, or a film made abroad, but *Days of Heaven* provoked charges of emptiness and reliance on superficial beauty. Finally, *Days of Heaven* is anything but forthright in its moral, psychological, or ideological propositions, unlike most of the films mentioned above. I would claim, however, that it is one of the most formidable achievements not only of its time, but in the history of film. It is an intricate *bricolage* of sound and image; the narrative generated by that complexity has many levels of articulation that repay close attention. It is a subtly corrosive portrayal of the way in which power in economic and love relationships converge; a treatise on film history and on film itself; a meditation on the role of the filmmaker; a classical tragedy that hinges on the ". . . human remoteness and futility in relation to the divine order" (Frye 146).

The film takes place in 1916-17, just as the Progressive Era is drawing to a close. It is the time of the Wright Brothers, Eastman, Ford, and Edison—a time of unparalleled technical innovation and swiftly enacted industrialization. The years from 1890 to the U.S. entry into World War I were marked by an intense upheaval in American society: rapid urban growth sustained by the influx of immigrants, coupled with the exploitation of cheap labor. It was a time when the large East and West coast cities became the power bases in the U.S., alienating middle America, engendering the sense of rootlessness and disenfranchisement that are one of the signal attributes of apocalyptic fiction (Sharrett 260). On the other hand, there was Woodrow Wilson's dream of a return to Jeffersonian agrarian democracy with its promise of classlessness. The idyllic pastoral vision is defined by what it excludes—the constraint of the city, of work, and of industry. The clash between these dualities comprises a central conflict in *Days of Heaven*. Malick locates the film in era relatively untouched by filmmakers prior to *Days of Heaven*—I can think of few exceptions (at the time the film was made): *The Ballad of Cable Hogue, East of Eden*—in order to present a fresh interpretation of the American psyche as seen through film.

The film begins with a series of still photographs that establish some of Malick's major concerns in *Days of Heaven*. The photographs present predominantly working class and/or immigrant subjects. The stills are nearly all cityscapes that trace their subjects at work, recreation, and in their residential environments. The lives that are registered take place in the tenement and the factory; there is little glamour in the subject's dress or demeanour. The first shot is an underexposed still of tall buildings; the sky fills the background of the frame. The photograph becomes progressively darker, achieving its correct exposure. There is a downward pan of the shot, disclosing a dense population of vendors, carts, shoppers, and strollers. The compressed disposition of the street life in the lower half of the photograph creates a distinct contrast to the stately buildings and expansive sky in the upper frame. We cannot perceive this distinction until the director recomposes the photograph. The stills invoke an original event—a time, a place and the taking of a photograph—while simultaneously referring to the later moment in history when Terrence Malick re-photographed the image.

The photographs in the credit sequence record an era in American history, but clearly these documents are mediated by the subjectivity of the photographers. Many of the photographs were made by Lewis Hine, the social worker/photographer who examined the working and living conditions of child laborers and immigrants. Hine acknowledged his biased view when he called his work "photo-interpretations." Malick also insists on declaring his

intervention by photographing this series of stills in a way that underscores his presence—the camera zooms in and out, and pans left and right, and up and down the stills. He retains each image for a different length of time before dissolving to the next photo; he uncovers the composition gradually to dramatize or accentuate certain elements. The director endows the photographs with a temporality and compositional resonance of his own manufacture. The twenty-four photographs become "moving pictures" specifically marked by the mediation of the director.

While the stills are mostly scenes of poverty and unskilled labor, the sequence is interspersed by dream-like pictures: the ice palace at the 1910 New York World's Fair, a man captured in mid-jump between two cliffs, and a young woman in a white costume gazing out to sea. There is a photograph of a dreamer—isolationist President Woodrow Wilson.

The final still is the opening of the film that is exclusively Malick's. In it, a young girl is crouched down confronting the camera. We learn retroactively that the girl is Linda, a character and the ostensible narrator within the fiction of the film. Yet the look of the photograph and its subject's face, expression, and pose, give it a patina of age that makes it indistinguishable from the preceding pictures. There is nothing exceptional about this strategy; old photographs have been used in credit sequences many times. Nor is it the first instance in which a still photograph representing a fictional character is summoned into motion, as a way of guiding the viewer into the narrative. In *Bonnie and Clyde,* Arthur Penn mixes photographs of the original Barrow gang with contemporaneous shots of the cast of his film; the photographs are punctuated by the click of the camera shutter, reflexively emphasizing the fictive nature of his creation.

What makes Malick's usage different is the complexity of the discourse it introduces in the film. When he situates his replication after authentic pre-existent photos, Malick posits several ideas. The fabrication of the old photograph enunciates the idea that while the film may *seem* to replicate the past, it is bound unequivocally to the present. Just as the photographs that precede the picture of Linda bear the imprint of their time and their creators, Malick's representation of history will be suffused equally with presentness and subjectivity. In the film's opening moments the spectator is informed that the images are manifestly subject to the control and manipulation of the director. Malick's study and re-composition of the stills solicits the participation of the audience; we are invited to reflect upon and consider the meaning of the images Malick will present. Just as surely as in the work of a director like Godard, we are asked to consider film as a vehicle for speculation and contemplation, to interrogate the composition and juxtaposition of the film's images, not to abandon ourselves to the specular experience. The role of viewing will, in fact, become key in the construction of the film. Moreover, Malick's presentation of his subject is anything but nostalgic. The immigrants and workers in the original photos are not romanticized; this film, he declares, will not be a nostalgic look back at a time that was better than our own. Malick does not mythisize his characters or their situation, as Arthur Penn does in *Bonnie and Clyde*. If Malick draws on myth, it is—as in most apocalyptic fiction—in order to delineate a world bereft of myth as a communal belief, a spiritually dead world (Sharrett 264-72).

Both the "old" and the "new" images exist along the continuum of history, and Malick aspires to review that history in his own terms. In this sense, as the stills are animated by the camera, *Days of Heaven* seeks to animate a discourse on history. The filmmaker is mediating what we see; he is also commenting throughout the film on the manner in which the history of film modulates our perception of history. He builds on a priori mythologies generated by film, situates them in a new context, and reinterprets them.

Malick sets forth this agenda by utilizing archetypes of film history, and of the western in particular. To this end he contrasts The Farmer (Sam Shepard), the "man of the west," with Bill (Richard Gere) the "outlaw," the urban renegade. The director succinctly establishes the archetypal presence of the two figures through his use of *mise-en-scène*, sound, dialogue, gesture, and action. The presentation of the characters calls upon the viewer's experience of genre; Malick depends on this tacit understanding to explore and challenge the

meaning of these archetypes.

Bill is initially discovered in a Chicago foundry. He is, throughout the film, associated with speed, noise, machinery, and fire; in short, the violence of modernity. Malick depicts the urban landscape as a hell on earth, a ". . . city of destruction and dreadful night" (Frye 150). A hand-held camera follows Bill's circular movements as he shovels gleaming molten lead into a furnace. The ambient sound is so loud that we cannot hear the ensuing argument between Bill and his foreman. Bill assaults his boss; he leaves the wounded or lifeless body and flees the scene of the crime. Bill is designated as an outlaw; he is—for the duration of the narrative—unprincipled and aggressive; he has, one might say, poor impulse control. In his subsequent escape to the farm, he will again confront a hostile foreman and equally degrading conditions of labor. Bill's representation as an outlaw is subverted by the pathos of his class victimization.

The Farmer is introduced in distinctly mythic terms. (He is known, significantly, by no other name than "The Farmer.") His awesome stature is accentuated, not only because he is played by Sam Shepard, but when he is framed in low angle shots, tasting the grain for readiness, signalling the beginning of the harvest with a dramatic sweep of his arm. A priest gives a benediction to the crops, affirming The Farmer's position on the side of the angels. The Farmer is associated with his large and elegant Victorian house, an imposing vertical structure standing in isolation amidst the flat and limitless horizon of the prairies. The Farmer is cast generically as a noble loner of many Westerns; his loneliness, he says, ". . . is something a man has to put up with. . . ." And like a western hero, he is able to face death with equanimity; his response to the knowledge that he has "maybe a year" to live is taciturn, as is most of his dialogue. He says, "Well, you never think it's gonna happen to you." Because of this presentation, The Farmer seems to enjoy an heroic status, a privileged relationship to the land, and to the cyclical patterns of nature. Malick is at great pains to disavow this innocent archetype.

The Farmer is, after all, a land owner, "the richest man in The Panhandle," as his accountant tells him. In order to live in his big house, The Farmer employs hundreds of seasonal migrant laborers to work his fields. Malick declares The Farmer's relationship to his workers by juxtaposing his privileged circumstances with those of his less fortunate workers. Their situation is described by the narrator. Linda says, "From the time the sun was up 'til it went down, they was workin' all the time, non-stop, just keep goin'. You didn't work, they just ship you right out." There is a cut from a shot of The Farmer in the picturesque light of dawn, commanding the work day to begin, to a shot of Abby (Brooke Adams) struggling to keep up with the thresher. In a later sequence, The Farmer, seated on an upholstered chair, sips from an ornamental glass as dirty and fatigued workers file by. There is a dissolve from a shot of Abby baling hay to The Farmer reclining on a sofa, sheltered from the sun by an umbrella, as an accountant informs him that it's his "biggest year ever." The Farmer never deals directly with the laborers; his foreman ruthlessly protects his boss's interests. As Linda perspicaciously notes, ". . . they don't need you, they can always get somebody else."

Days of Heaven describes a circle of use and abuse; Bill, The Farmer, and Abby are conjoined in a project of mutual exploitation. The sequence of events that best supports this contention occurs when Bill cynically and desperately persuades Abby to marry the terminally ill farmer—who loves her—for his money. He says, "Look, the man's got one foot on a banana peel, the other foot on a roller skate. And we'll all be gone in a coupla' years, who's gonna care that we acted perfect?" Abby is to some extent a victim, but a willing one. (She is equally the progeny of the dark woman, the forbidden fruit of the nineteenth-century novel.) Abby exchanges the metaphorical prostitution of dehumanized labor for prostitution of a different nature—in essence, selling herself to The Farmer. The connection between marriage and prostitution is most explicitly proclaimed when Bill, continuing his argument in favor of the marriage, talks about Abby working the fields, "I hate it. To see you stooped over out there. Them lookin' at your ass like you were a whore." There is a dissolve directly after this line to the wedding ceremony of Abby and The Farmer. The final, unmistakable assertion of The Farmer's possession of Abby occurs after his fields have been

destroyed by locusts and fire. He binds her hand and foot to his house, branding her as his chattel.

The antagonistic poles of rugged individualism represented by both archetypal figures in *Days of Heaven* are suffused by a corruption of the spirit. The death of the two male characters is resolutely deglamourized. The Farmer dies with a screwdriver stuck in his chest; Bill is hunted down and shot in the back. The film again reveals its origins in apocalypticism, which would claim that through the provocation of crisis and general destruction, civilization is reminded of its sacred destiny.

The motif of subjectivity put forth in the credit sequence is woven structurally throughout the film. The power struggle between Bill and The Farmer is waged largely in terms of their "looks" of possession; the act of viewing becomes a crucial dramatic figure. At important points in the narrative, intercut shots of the viewer and viewed are used to precipitate events. Bill's first point-of-view shot contains The Farmer's land and animals. As the narrative progresses his looks incorporate everything he covets, everything that belongs to The Farmer—his house, his possessions, and finally, his wife. The Farmer's possession of Abby begins when he sees her working in the fields. The specular nature of his desire is emphasized when he views her through his telescope, the frame irised to reproduce The Farmer's viewpoint. Linda narrates, "This farmer, he didn't know when he first *saw* her, what it was that caught his *eye*. Maybe it was the way the wind blew through her hair." After urging Abby to marry The Farmer, Bill expresses his love for her by saying, "I remember the first time I *saw* you. I'd never *seen* hair so black or skin so pretty. I was scared I'd never *see* you again." It is The Farmer's sight of Bill and Abby's embrace that precedes the locust attack and ends in the destruction of the land and the death of the two men.

An account of a brief sequence of events in the film demonstrates the importance of the glance. Bill arrives at the farm unannounced after a sojourn with a circus troupe. He beholds Abby from a distance, teaching herself a minuet as a gramophone plays. In this shot he sees that she is bettering herself; he sees that she now belongs to a more gracious world than he can dream of offering her. In the next shot The Farmer regards Bill, and as Bill looks at Abby, their looks of possession momentarily converge. After the reunion of the group, there is a cut to The Farmer and Abby seen through the windows of the house as they ascend the staircase to the bedroom, embracing. This shot is revealed as Bill's point of view as he stands outside the house. In this series of shots, the drama of jealousy, loss, desire, and possession is enacted through the medium of the look. It functions in the film as a pivot between subject and object, between the powerful and powerless.

But it is also the blindness of the protagonists that provides the tragic material of *Days of Heaven*. Bill has claimed that Abby is his sister, rather than his lover, because, as Linda says, "My brother didn't want nobody to know. You know how people are. You tell 'em somethin' and they start talkin'." But the apparent intimacy of their relationship arouses suspicions. A fellow worker confronts Bill; he says, "Your sister keep you warm at night, does she?" But The Farmer fails to recognize the true nature of their relationship; he cannot see what is before him, until it is literally put on display. Bill is equally blinded by his desire for The Farmer's money; he cannot see that pushing Abby into an affective relationship will result in the loss of the woman he loves. But it is our looking, as well as the looks of the film's characters, on which the meaning of the film turns.

Some of the most privileged acts of viewing are built around the screening of a film on the farm; we watch the characters in *Days of Heaven* watching a film. At this point, the tension between Bill and The Farmer has escalated with Bill's realization that Abby is in love with the dying man. An Italian circus troupe arrives on the farm and entertains the assembled group. There is a shot of a belly dancer performing, then a shot from a film being screened, Chaplin's *The Immigrant*. The actors in the Chaplin film look offscreen; there is a cut to what they see—the Statue of Liberty. A character in Malick's film reaches out and points to the statue; his arm is silhouetted on the frame of the Chaplin film. There is a cut to a longer shot of the group of huddled immigrants in the Chaplin film: a customs official enters the frame and begins tying a rope around them. Linda narrates over these shots:

"Devil just sittin' there laughin'. He's glad when people does bad. He sends them to the snake house. He just sits there and laughs and watches while you're sittin' there all tied up and the snakes are eatin' your eyes out." The camera tracks toward Linda watching; a film projector is behind her head. It is difficult to determine if the expression on her face is one of terror or amazement; in any case, her concentration is intense. The voice-over goes on: "They go down your throat and eat all your systems out." Several shots later, the party continues in a gazebo surrounded by translucent white curtains. On the curtains, as The Farmer approaches the group, he sees the enlarged silhouette of Bill and Abby as they tenderly touch one another; there is nothing sibling-like in their caresses. Linda says: "I think the Devil was on the farm."

The scene, supported by Linda's voice-over, offers a sublime précis of Malick's concerns in *Days of Heaven*. On one level, Linda's story about the Devil relates to the spectacle of human foolishness and turmoil enacted by Bill, Abby, and The Farmer, that will shortly erupt into cataclysm. A silent film, as it were, of Abby and Bill's love affair is screened for The Farmer on the white curtains. He later roughly confronts Abby, asking her: "Why do you let him touch you like that?" But he does not trust what is plainly visible, and accepts Abby's pitifully feeble defense. The punishment for failing to see in *Days of Heaven* is a fatal one.

Because there is a straight cut from the belly dancer in the fiction of *Days of Heaven* to *The Immigrant*, without a frame to demarcate the borders of the Chaplin film, an implicit comparison is made between the two filmed fictions. At the point when the arm of the character in Malick's film emerges on the frame of Chaplin's film, the two fictions become enmeshed. The three brief shots from *The Immigrant* are selected to describe the naïve expectations of the new arrivals to America. For them, the Statue of Liberty is an icon; freedom is their new religion. In the third shot, the immigrants are bound up by the customs official. Similarly, the migrants in *Days of Heaven* are ensnared in the double bind of their expectations and their experience. In the "classless" democratic system, whether in the unambiguous desolation of the city or in the deceptive promise of emancipation in the wide-open west, the characters remain in bondage to structures of power over which they have no control, and "The Devil just sits there and laughs." Malick confronts the dark side of the great American myth of the frontier, and the archetypal figures it spawned.

The relationship between Linda's narration and the images in this sequence is crucial. Her words seem to comprise Linda's response to the film she is witnessing, to the turbulence around her, but further—if *Days of Heaven* can be seen to be partly about film and its mediational qualities, Linda's words assume an even greater importance. Linda is clearly enthralled by the film she is watching. The ideas she expresses recall the credit sequence, and Terrence Malick's assumption that film is an object of contemplation and interrogation. Film has a seductive, even manipulative power, like the Devil in the snake house. The image has the ability to captivate with its illusions—for the immigrants in the Chaplin film (the image of liberty), for the "lookers" in *Days of Heaven* (the power of possession), and for the spectator enraptured by the beauty of the film. From the opening shots of the film, Malick assumes responsibility for these images—he does not "sit there and laugh and watch" the spectators in "the snake house." He acknowledges the power of the film to mediate our lives, to alter our consciousness about history, and to create and destroy myths.

The previous scene also points to one of the most interesting features of *Days of Heaven*, which it shares with Malick's previous film *Badlands*: its intriguing use of voice-over. It often works as a counterpoint to the romance story line, and sometimes in contrast to the visual track of the film. As in *Badlands*, the narrating voice is that of a young girl. The voice-over differs from the narrational voice in *Badlands* in that Linda's voice-over is a rich combination of innocence, received opinion, and *weltschmerz*. The voice-over functions in different ways—at times it is informational, at times it works in an ironic or oblique relationship to the images in the film, at times it delivers a poignant commentary; it is an intricate, often ambiguous device. After Bill fatally stabs The Farmer, Linda says: "Nobody's perfect. There was never a perfect person. You just got half-devil and half angel in you."

Linda's comment has an ironic, even humorous effect, out of keeping with the tragic event that has just occurred, and her justification, "There never was a perfect person," reinforces her perspective as a naïf. Even the least keen observer would notice that Bill has transgressed just about every moral law in existence during the course of the film. At the same time, Linda's voice-over proposes a rather accurate, even sagacious assessment of the human condition.

The voice-over offers a complicated access to the film's narrative. In one instance Bill and Abby are shown working in the fields while The Farmer, poised on horseback, dictates orders to The Foreman. Linda says, "This farmer, he had a big spread and a lot of money. Whoever was sittin' in the chair when he come round, why they'd stand up and give it to him. Wasn't no harm in him. You give him a flower; he'd keep it forever." At this point, Bill and Abby, running, quickly drink water, then rush back to work. Linda continues, "He was headed for the boneyard any minute, but he wasn't really squawkin' about it, like some people. In one way, I felt sorry for him, cause he had nobody to stand out for him, be by his side. Hold his hand when he needs attention or somethin'. That's touchin'." Linda's speech begins unsympathetically, citing The Farmer's economic dominance over his workers, reinforced by the image of Bill and Abby struggling to meet the demands of their job. But her voice shifts to one of solicitude for The Farmer's illness, and his isolation. However, the onscreen images continue to tell a different story—that of Bill and Abby's hardship—undercutting Linda's empathetic remarks.

Linda's commentary also functions as an avenue to the archetypal and apocalyptic vision that underwrites the film. She says:

> I met this guy named Ding-Dong. He told me the whole earth was goin' up in flames. Flames would come out of here and there and they'll rise up. And the mountains are gonna' go up in big flames. The water's gonna rise in flames. There's gonna' be creatures runnin' every which way. Some of them hurt. Half their wings burnin'. People are gonna be screamin' and hollerin' for help. See the people that have been good, they're gonna' go to heaven and escape all that fire. But if you been bad, God don't even hear you. He don't even hear you talkin'.

Her speech is predictive of the events that will be visualized later in the film. They begin with The Farmer's recognition of his wife and her lover's duplicity, followed by a plague of locusts, and then by a fire that consumes the harvest (with the resonance that invokes—the destruction of fertility, the corruption of the communal ritual, etc.) and finally, the death of The Farmer and Linda's brother. Linda's words, "God don't even hear you," promote the tragic and apocalyptic conception that subtends *Days of Heaven*, which is "the supremacy of impersonal power and the limitation of human efforts" (Frye 209). Finally, Linda's utterances are marked by a worldweariness that lends gravity and pathos to her blighted childhood. She says, "Sometimes I feel very old. Like my whole life's over. Like I'm not around no more." Malick achieves a rare feat with Linda's voice-over: he adds layers of complexity to the little girl we witness onscreen, creating a character with an absorbing personality, and a sometimes enigmatic world-view.

Perhaps Linda's voice is to some extent Terrence Malick's surrogate voice in *Days of Heaven*—a voice equally compassionate and detached, confused, and clear-eyed. One of the mysteries of the film is: to what does the title of the film refer? What exactly are the *Days of Heaven*? Does it allude to the evanescent love the characters feel for one another before their greed, duplicity, and blindness overtake them; the brief days of happiness the characters experience before their destruction? Surely, the days of heaven do not refer to pre-industrial, pre-capitalist society, the fiction of the "worker's paradise?" Or, more in keeping with the film's contrasting imagery of Eden and The Inferno, of innocence and experience—were the heavenly days, the days before humans entered time and history, before the fall, some brief instant of harmony when the natural world was uncorrupted by the malevolence of the human species? Possibly the meaning of "heaven" is problematic. Perhaps the god charting the misfortunes in *Days of Heaven* is not a benevolent one, but one given to vengeance, or wrath, or at best the indifference of "impersonal power." In this

schema, the apocalyptic devastation in *Days of Heaven* is a way to remind us—in our secular, materialist society—of our spiritual obligations. It is a way to make sense of an incomprehensible universe—for perhaps in the pain of human suffering and destruction lies the possibility of purification—and maybe even redemption.

Days of Heaven opens onto such multifarious levels of engagement, that one can only hope to suggest, within the scope of an essay, the possibilities offered by the film. Perhaps it is best to conclude on a note of simplicity, because at base, *Days of Heaven* is one of the rare works of American cinema that has the condensed power of poetry, and in fact I would argue that Malick is indeed both a filmmaker and a poet. An image that is emblematic of this poetic vision occurs after Abby has married The Farmer. Bill steals into their room and rouses Abby from her marriage bed in the dark of night; they grab a bottle of wine and a set of crystal glasses. In a rare moment of happiness, they embrace, as they wade across a shallow lake on The Farmer's property. In the excitement of their dangerous liaison, one of them drops a wineglass into the water. After they have departed, there is a long-held shot of the glass on the lake's bottom as a fish swims by. As in all good poetry, the image operates on a variety of planes—on a concrete level of connotation—the sense of stolen moments and stolen objects, as an indication of the couple's fatal carelessness which will later breed tragedy and destruction. The image also resonates with abstract feelings—loss, loneliness, displacement, entombment, and an ineffable, portentous melancholy. It is a reminder of *l'eternal retour;* the narrative, as Peter Brooks claims in *Reading for the Plot*, always carrying the seed of its own death, and of human death in general. This lyrical potency is dexterously woven throughout *Days of Heaven.* It is a film that haunts the imagination and the intellect, a film of its time that is also timeless, and an almost inexpressibly stunning achievement.

Carole Zucker
Concordia University

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