The Tree Makes It Nice
The Cinematic Universe of Terrence Malick

by

Genevieve Rose Angelson
Class of 2008

A thesis submitted to the faculty of Wesleyan University in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Degree of Bachelor of Arts with Departmental Honors in Film Studies

Middletown, Connecticut

April, 2008
Acknowledgments

This thesis represents the life-changing influence of the following people:

Mom and Dad, for both supporting and forgiving me for this project, and the good fortune that my two favorite people in the world are also my parents
My brave and beautiful older sisters, for going first
Emily Shechtman, for her wonders
Josh Scannell, for his brotherhood
Sally and Rick Rosen, for lighting up a room
Max Goldblatt, for his fateful wisdom
The Film Board, namely Thaddeus Ruzicka, Maya Kazan, Justin Denis
The Front Row of the Film Series and its honorable patrons
185 Washington St, residents past and present
58 Fountain St, residents past and present
Court 13’s intrepid princes, namely Ray Tintori, Dan Janvey, Michael Gottwald
The Shechtman Family
Mary Kredell and LBI Jim
The Criterion Collection
Richard Gere
Bruce Springsteen
Omar Little
Ira Glass
Bishop Carlton Pearson
Babewatch

My deepest gratitude:
Lisa Dombrowski, for her ongoing support as a mentor and a friend
Scott Higgins, for making me fear the arrival of a train, getting me hooked
Lea Carlson, for her patience and her treats
Richard Slotkin, for being the real deal
John Basinger, for supporting student filmmaking, and for his unflagging warmth
Sincerely, for Jeanine Basinger – the true movie fan – for making me think. Although I know I have been warned, I wish I could take you with me.

Neither acknowledgment nor gratitude does justice to what Rob Leitzell is owed:
“...For being a trailblazer. For your conviction, for your tenacity, and for your relentless spirit: we celebrate you, you lion.” For your patient heart. For everything.

In fond memory of the too many who passed since this project began:
Dottie Strumph, Hope Rosen, Luis Alberto Denis, Whitney Booth, Chase Parr,
Claire Shenker Rosen and Josiel Szapiro
For Kieran,
for sticking with me.
Table of Contents

Introduction ........................................................................................................... 4

Chapter 1: Badlands ............................................................................................ 21

Chapter 2: Days of Heaven .................................................................................. 44

Chapter 3: The Thin Red Line .............................................................................. 72

Chapter 4: The New World .................................................................................. 108

Conclusion ........................................................................................................... 134

Appendix ............................................................................................................. 142

Works Consulted ................................................................................................. 157
Introduction:

The Trees
Over the 35 years since his first feature release, Terrence Malick has directed only four features. However, each film reflects a filmmaker with a mature understanding of the film medium, and an aesthetic that unites his body of work. Malick’s films stray from classical filmmaking conventions in a manner that frequently results in his reference alongside Scorsese, Coppola, Lucas, Ashby, and Bogdanovich as a defining filmmaker of the 1970s New Hollywood. However, the discourse surrounding Malick as a filmmaker has had a distinctive impact on the attention given to his films. Often acknowledged as the Salinger of cinema, Malick has attracted wide curiosity for his self-imposed withdrawal from the public eye, including a twenty-year hiatus between the releases of *Days of Heaven* and *The Thin Red Line.*1 As the filmmaker retreated from the world at large, film scholars have avoided the mysterious nature of Malick's films (as Richard Gere once said, "that's where the guy lives – it's not his vacation place.").2 Sam Shepard sees the lack of written analysis on Malick’s body of work differently. The temptation to write about Terrence Malick’s cinema, he considers futile,

"You can analyze it to death, but that is still not going to get to what this poem is doing to you, to your psyche, your body, it’s never gonna solve that."3

Whether a reflection of Shepard’s stance or Malick’s reclusiveness, literature that expounds upon his distinguished body of work is conspicuously scarce.

The literature on Malick’s films appears predominantly in essay form, taking a single Malick film as its subject or referencing a Malick film so as to solve a broader

---

1 Handy & Douglas, 1997; TIME magazine  
2 Gere, 2007; interview  
3 Shepard, 2007; interview
research question. Analysis of Malick’s films appears in other forms including extended film reviews and articles in film journals such as Film Comment, Film Quarterly, and Senses of Cinema. Two full-length books are devoted to Malick’s filmmaking. The Cinema of Terrence Malick: Poetic Visions of America, edited by Hannah Patterson, is a collection of essays by various authors, each of whom approaches a specific Malick film from a specific angle. The Films of Terrence Malick, written by James Morrison and Thomas Schur, creates a semi-biographical anthology of Malick’s work, beginning its analysis with a chapter on Malick’s pre-Badlands career. Both sets of authors published these books before Malick’s 2005 release of The New World. Apart from those who write about Malick for his films’ sake, there are also those writers who approach his films in the context of New Hollywood, and inevitably those who include his films in analyses of other subjects or themes altogether. Malick most commonly appears in books devoted to American filmmaking in the 1970s, or more broadly in books analyzing changes and trends in American filmmaking from the collapse of the studio system. In sum, Malick’s name appears more frequently in lists than it does on book covers.

The mystery that shrouds Malick as a filmmaker is a common entry point for many who have written on his films. Peter Biskind approaches Malick through personality traits and production history from the few firsthand accounts of those who have worked closely with him. In each of Easy Riders, Raging Bulls and Gods and Monsters, Biskind includes anecdotal histories of Malick’s undisciplined approach to filmmaking and his trying relationships with financiers and producers. Morrison and Schur’s book combines biography with film analysis. However, in doing so, the book
strays from a film studies approach to Malick’s features. In its opening chapter, the book describes Malick’s pre-Badlands career as a philosophy scholar. In its later chapters, the authors then tend to approach Malick’s films through a philosophical lens, supporting their research with secondary resources in literature and philosophy. The most valuable examination of Malick’s filmmaking tactics and his films appears in Nestor Almendros’ A Man with a Camera in the chapter on Days of Heaven. Awarded an Oscar for his role as the director of photography, Almendros offers insight into Malick’s filmmaking goals based on their collaboration, although his larger purpose is to offer technical explanations for the film’s visual effects.⁴

Other scholars who have tackled Malick’s films isolate one characteristic of his work they deem most salient for analysis: his use of themes, genre, subjectivity, sound, or voiceover. Michel Chion’s The Voice in Cinema, on voiceover narration in film, includes an insightful chapter on Days of Heaven that analyzes the function of Linda’s narration and its effects on viewers. Patterson’s anthology, the second of the two full-length books on Malick, includes fourteen scholars’ essays on his first three films, each approaching one cinematic subject in one or two of the films at most. Neil Campbell’s essay analyzes Badlands as an example of the Road Movie genre, whereas John Orr approaches Badlands and Days of Heaven as Westerns, comparing them to the films of Arthur Penn. As a whole, the collection analyzes a comprehensive set of systems in Malick’s films. However, the essays lack any relationship to one another, thus precluding the book’s ability to draw useful overarching conclusions about Malick’s use of the film medium or his films’ growth over time.

⁴ Orr, 2001; pp. 234-246
Collectively, the literature comprises analysis of several of Malick’s cinematic universe’s fundamental attributes and a wide variety of his films’ themes. The topics most frequently adopted by film scholars are the films’ variations on established genres, their use of voiceover narration, and the mesmerizing tone that inevitably appears from Malick’s style of storytelling. However, the literature still demonstrates considerable inadequacies that call for more research. The state of Malick’s existing scholarship has three primary holes. Most obviously, The New World, perhaps Malick’s highest achievement, remains untouched by any film analysis. Consequently, no individual work yet provides a comprehensive analysis of Malick’s whole output – how the films structure their narrative and stylistic systems in order to reveal underlying themes.

Patterson’s anthology covers wide territory, some areas more successfully than others, but lacks the instructive conclusions that a unified presentation should provide. Morrison and Schur come slightly closer to this goal, but ultimately evidence the final flaw in the scholarship on Malick’s films. The literature’s most significant deficiency is the lack of analysis that treats film as film – examining Malick’s work through a film studies framework, from the evidence the films present onscreen and their discernible cues for the viewing experience.

My project is distinguished from previous literature in its breadth as well as its depth. By examining all four of Malick’s features, my research aims to uncover the filmmaker’s recurring themes and overarching techniques in order to define the terms of his cinematic universe. What are the recurring themes that Malick’s films reveal? Do Malick’s films approach narrative structure similarly, and if so, for what effects on
the viewing experience? Which stylistic devices define Malick’s aesthetic? How do those tools function to illustrate the films’ underlying themes? Each chapter explores one film in depth, analyzing the films according to these questions. The analysis relates each film to the others in order to define thematic variations and examine how Malick’s filmmaking goals develop over time. Finally, my research attempts to define the viewing experience that Malick’s use of the medium and approach to narrative storytelling produce, particularly the shifting definition of the viewer’s role in creating meaning from the films’ cues.

Terrence Malick’s cinematic universe begins with his films’ thematic fixations. Richard Gere believes, from his experience working on *Days of Heaven*,

“[Malick] works from a sense of space, whether it’s physical space, mental space, or spiritual space.”

In this assessment, Gere identifies two (related, but distinct) traits of Malick’s films, one regarding their stories’ forms and the other regarding their stories’ themes. Malick’s films share a central premise: each presents two opposite worlds, two spaces with distinct ways of life, in which a character or characters must reconcile what they believe with where they belong. One space’s way of life inevitably is defined by the harmony shared among humans, nature, and God. The other space typically is characterized by its culture’s modernization, whether it be industrialized, militarized, or even suburbanized, to the detriment of nature or loss of God. The films locate the majority of their narrative action in one of the two aforementioned worlds, revealing

---

5 Gere, 2007; interview
the other to varying extents: *Days Of Heaven* presents its two worlds with the most disproportion, *The New World* presents both worlds most equally.

Malick builds his cinematic universe on a foundation that suggests humans, nature, and God are interrelated entities. His recurring story model is designed to highlight this pivotal ongoing theme. The films reveal the underlying theme to varying extents. The theme’s God aspect does not appear yet in *Badlands*, or if so its cues are too subtle to affect the viewing experience. Furthermore, not until *The New World* do the three entities appear in a relationship with a clear defined meaning. But each film suggests that humans, nature, and eventually God are related, questioning and even proposing a possible relationship between the three, before ultimately *The New World* delineates the relationship conclusively. Although the films share certain common approaches to narrative structure and stylistic devices, later defined, the tools share no universal function across Malick’s body of work. Each film makes use of narrative and style to suggest Malick’s recurring themes in a unique fashion according to the films’ specific thematic arguments and the story each film tells.

Malick’s films bring forward his recurring themes from distinctly American stories, rooted in generic legends, historical legends, or purely cultural folklore. His films cast familiar stories in a new light thematically by focusing on the relationship between humans, nature, and God in a given story’s presentation. Thus, whereas *The Thin Red Line* has all the markings of a generic combat film, or the historical event of the battle for Guadalcanal, Malick’s narrative and stylistic devices reveal themes that surpass the stories’ traditional meanings.
The films’ overarching narrative structures are causally driven, but typically present their plotlines in an episodic fashion. The common pace with which each film presents its narrative is among the key characteristics of Malick’s universe. Each narrative structure distributes its plot to accommodate time in which to characterize the film’s focal setting. Exposition of space is a key method with which the films reveal their underlying themes. Malick’s unwavering connection between space and story consistently characterize his films’ viewing experiences as ones defined by the pleasures of the natural world.

The two stylistic devices that define Malick’s aesthetic are voiceover narration and subsequently pictorialism. Each of his films employs voiceover, ranging from one character’s in each of Badlands and Days of Heaven, to that of many in The Thin Red Line, to the three leading characters’ in The New World. However, Malick’s use of the film medium is distinguished for his ongoing experimentation with voiceover narration’s stylistic and narrative possibilities. Holly’s voiceover in Badlands operates most straightforwardly as a narrator. In Days of Heaven, Linda’s voiceover functions as though another audience member, articulating the film’s attitudes towards its characters and events, and exemplifying the intended viewer’s role. In The Thin Red Line, voiceover narration expresses characters’ inner thoughts as they form their understanding of the chaos in their world. The New World combines the techniques of prior films, occasionally employing the straightforward narrator purpose but also articulating the thoughts in the characters’ heads. In its own specific fashion, each film’s voiceover narration reveals the film’s themes. Just as The New World puts forth
the most conclusive definition of the relationship between humans, nature, and God, so too does its voiceover play an unprecedented role as the means by which characters speak to God.

Pictorial shots are the alternative device with which Malick’s films reveal their underlying themes, frequently in conjunction with a simultaneous voiceover narration. Pictorialism is a stylistic device in which carefully composed shots function as individual units of information derived from the film’s plot or themes. Pictorial shots punctuate the narrative, highlighting meaning derived from the film’s themes or occasionally, as in *Badlands*, its plot. Although pictorial shots appear in each of Malick’s earlier films, his use of pictorialism grows increasingly more evident over time. The comparative notability of the later films’ use of pictorial shots corresponds to the increasing prominence of the themes that the shots represent.

Malick’s films, like many films that retrospectively define the New Hollywood, present narrative structures and uses of style that defy classical conventions. However, Malick’s narrative and stylistic design are never designed to call attention to the filmmaking process. Any techniques that classify as unconventional in Malick’s films exist expressly for their ability to convey the films’ underlying themes. To draw viewers out of the film’s universe and remind them that they are watching a film would defy the fundamental cinematic goals Malick’s films aim to achieve. Malick does not want viewers to feel as though they are watching a movie – his films encourage audiences to view nature, and to recognize the larger forces that control his films’ universes and their characters. His approach to production in the 1970s resembled the same
documentary impulses that propelled other directors to make rough-edged urban films. The distinctive qualities of Malick’s films appear in small part because he feels impelled to document beautiful events in nature rather than New York City.

However, by *The Thin Red Line*, Malick’s films display a willingness to stylistically alter the presentation of their worlds according to a character or characters’ subjective experience of it. Character subjectivity emerges as a technique through which Malick’s films can be cinematically expressive rather than verbally expressive. His later two films increasingly use style rather than speech to communicate the film’s story, which they justify by entering a character’s point of view. Subjective presentations justify overt stylization for Malick because they depict the world as one character sees it rather than the world as it truly is or could be. With the shift in style, viewers commonly respond to the films’ increasingly ambiguous cues with which to construct meaning. For those who assemble the film’s cues, the viewing experience connects that much more deeply with the film’s universe, just as for those who do not, the experience alienates viewers. *The New World* revises the ambiguous presentation of *The Thin Red Line*’s challenging cues, reducing the complexity of its plot in order to maintain viewers’ connections to the story as well as Malick’s new more subjective use of style.

Malick’s aesthetic positions the audience to view the films’ stories as larger than their characters. From the stylistic exposition each film devotes to its landscape, the films encourage viewers to understand the characters as emblematic of the world in which they are presented. Malick’s films do not create antagonists, although
unsympathetic characters appear more prominently in his later films. Rather, as best exemplified by Linda’s voiceover narration in *Days of Heaven*, each film encourages viewers to sympathize with multiple characters and view them as controlled by larger forces within the story, usually emanating from one of the film’s worlds. While Malick’s films do not foster particularly negative attitudes towards any character or group of characters, they typically favor one of the two worlds presented in their stories. The world presented less favorably, unanimously the one in which humans, nature, and God operate most discretely, is the one that viewers are typically positioned to understand as responsible for any negative outcome in the plot or characters’ actions. Malick’s films, early and late alike, encourage viewers to allow themselves to be guided by their sympathy for the characters. *Badlands* cues the experience by withholding the characters’ emotions and asking viewers to imagine how they might feel from the story’s events. In opposition, *Days of Heaven* tells a story defined by its passions. Through the example Linda’s character sets, the film encourages viewers to release their judgments of the characters as flawed and to sympathize with them as victims of larger fates.

Malick’s later films create a different viewing experience, endowing viewers with greater responsibility to construct the films’ meaning. The trait is at least one probable cause for the poorer reception of Malick’s later films; they rely on the viewer’s willingness to assemble more ambiguous formal cues. The shift appears related in certain ways to the later films’ more subjective approach to style. When Malick puts the narration of his films’ stories into specific characters’ hands, the construction of
voiceover narration shifts so that viewers are no longer the intended audience.

Voiceover narration functions as an expression of internal thoughts or thoughts shared with God and characters no longer explain themselves as accessibly. *The Thin Red Line* and *The New World* leave the responsibility of making sense of their formal cues to viewers. Malick entices viewers’ willingness to make a subjective engagement with the plot events that lead the characters’ to ask their film’s central thematic questions.

*Badlands*, Malick’s debut film, does not yet present the full spectrum of attributes that come to define his subsequent films. The suggested connection between humans and nature is subtler than its later appearances, and an oblique connection to God appears only in the film’s stylization. The film tells the story of the Charles Starkweather murder spree in the late 1950s and his relationship with his girlfriend Caril Fugate. From their tale, the film presents two distinct spaces: civilized society where Kit (Starkweather) and Holly (Fugate) are wanted criminals, and the badlands of South Dakota where the two characters play out their love story in the wilderness. Nature’s role in the film functions to characterize Kit as belonging to the wild, in contrast to Holly who belongs decidedly in civilization. Digressive character interactions punctuate the causally driven narrative structure, often providing exposition of Kit and Holly’s relationship, and tracing its dissolution over time.

*Badlands* displays a comparatively less visual method of storytelling, the result of Holly’s voiceover narration and a heavier reliance on dialogue. Although the verbal emphasis of the film results in a less palpable presence of Malick’s dominant themes, the design creates a more classical viewing experience. The film’s choice to withhold the
characters’ internal states encourages viewers to empathize with the characters by recognizing what their own reactions to the events would be – an empathy that defines the viewing experience of Malick’s films.

By *Days of Heaven*, Malick’s cinematic universe appears in its full realization. The narrative structure is distinct from its predecessor due in part to its comparatively simpler plot. Two lovers, Bill and Abby, pose as brother and sister in order to scheme their inheritance of their employer’s wealth when he, Chuck, falls in love with Abby. In between plot events, the film typically explores the characters’ natural environment, creating a relationship between humans and nature partially through their equal treatment in the narrative structure. In the plot, nature takes an active role, leading to the natural disaster in which humans and nature collide in the plot’s climax. The film provides the motivation for the descent of a plague of locusts, an unconcealed biblical reference, through the ongoing apocalyptic themes in Linda’s voiceover narration.

Thus, the voiceover narration unites the narrative’s concurrent presentation of humans and the natural world via its own God-fearing theme. Linda’s function as a narrator shifts from Holly’s in a fashion that similarly shifts the viewer’s role. Apart from highlighting the film’s biblical themes, Linda’s narration operates as if she is simply another viewer commenting on the action. Her sympathetic attitude towards the characters, in spite of their arguable wrongdoings, encourages viewers to see the characters as products of the forces in their worlds – the inevitable victims of a world in which humans attempt to assert control over the universe’s natural balance.
Among Malick’s four features, *The Thin Red Line* features his recurring themes most prominently and with the greatest complexity. The film tells the story of the battle for Guadalcanal, a turning point in WWII for the US military, from multiple points of view within one company. The film’s two worlds comprise the Guadalcanal, ravaged by human cruelty, and an unidentified island in the South Pacific in which humans and nature coexist in perfect harmony. The film suggests three discrete arguments that interrelate humans, nature, and God. The first argument proposes that all mankind shares one soul. The film conveys this theme through juxtapositions in its narrative structure, distributing subjectivity across characters in disparate ranks via shared flashback sequences and voiceover narration, and through the employment of an unidentified ongoing voiceover that functions to represent every character’s thoughts. In addition, the film contrasts human nature with the natural world, looking to nature to find evidence of the cruelty mankind is capable of enacting against other men. The film reveals this theme through its narrated content, pictorialism, and through the insertion of nature at heightened moments in the characters’ plotlines. Finally, over the course of the film, the film encourages viewers to look for a connection between God and the natural world. The film prompts this connection through an elaborate combination of cues including voiceover narration, score motifs, and patterns and variations in the film’s pictorial shots. *The Thin Red Line* encourages viewers’ engagement by increasing access to character subjectivity. Through stylistic devices such as subjective and objective sound, discontinuous editing and hand-held camera movement, the film attempts to present viewers with the same experience the
characters undergo, leading them to ask similar questions about the relationship among humanity, nature, and God.

*The New World* combines the strengths of Malick’s past films to create what is arguably his most successful use of the medium. In the film’s retelling of the John Smith and Pocahontas love story, it opposes two distinct ways of life in Jamestown, Virginia. The colonists’ settlement presents a world isolated from nature, dictated by meaningless human constructs, traditions that deprive the colony’s inhabitants of fulfilling spiritual existences and cause them mortal harm. The Powhatan village presents a world in which humans, nature and God are indistinguishable, intermingling in a fashion that leads the Powhatan tribe to thrive. Through clearly legible, cinematic terms, the film proposes that humans, nature and God are not only interrelated, but unified by one spirit. Rather than embodying this theme in a spatially defined world, the film communicates it though its protagonist. Pocahontas, pictorial shots, voiceover narration, and overlapping and discontinuous editing comprise the tools with which the film reveals its central argument themes. Pocahontas’ voiceover appears in contrast to two other characters, distinguishing her own voiceover’s function as her vessel through which to communicate with God. In belonging to the greater of the two, the film allows for the most equal presentation of ideal world’s way of life rather than simply the condemnation of its opposite. Through a stylized use of discontinuous as well as overlapping editing, the film attempts to communicate tactile sensations and emotional moments to viewers in cinematic terms. No prior Malick film encourages its viewers towards a deep sympathetic connection with its characters.
or inspire viewers’ awe in the film’s spiritual, natural universe with such a mature understanding of the film medium.

Terrence Malick’s cinematic universe encourages viewers to feel compassion for its characters, to view them as controlled by larger forces within the story, usually emanating from one of the film’s two worlds. Each film presents less favorably the world in which humans, nature, and God operate most discretely. Malick’s films experiment with his preferred approach to narrative structure and his stylistic pendants in order to reveal characters who share a deep yearning for the union of humankind with nature and with God. Malick’s films invite viewers into a universe in which the only villain is villainy itself, where spirituality is omnipresent, and with the offer of heaven on earth for those willing to construct it. Although this universe is created at its highest level in The New World, Malick’s burgeoning universe is evident as early as Badlands, thirty-five years prior. However, Malick’s inclusion among the New Hollywood collective of 1970s filmmakers does not indicate the recognition of these distinctive themes, or so the existing literature on Malick would suggest. His acknowledgement among the so-called movie brats is the probable result of his interest in cinematic storytelling that defies the constructs of classical conventions, and his films’ challenges to popular understandings of American historical narratives.
Chapter 1. 

**Badlands (1973)**

Malick's first feature is based on the Charles Starkweather/Caril Fugate murder spree across various towns in the American Northwest in the late fall of 1957. On an ordinary day in Fort Dupree, South Dakota, Kit Carruthers, a garbage collector with a striking resemblance to James Dean, meets Holly Sargis, a girl ten years his junior who lives alone with her father. Kit and Holly fall in love despite Mr. Sargis' best attempts to keep them from each other. One day, after unsuccessfully confronting Holly's father, Kit shoots him and flees with his daughter. Thus begins a string of murders that Kit commits as he attempts to evade the law, in search of a place where he and Holly can live freely.\(^6\)

---

\(^6\) For a complete narrative segmentation, see Appendix.
Critics and fans frequently identify *Badlands* as one of the strongest debut films in American cinema history.\(^7\) However, *Badlands* is an outlier among Terrence Malick’s films. The narrative structure, use of themes, and stylistic presentation set apart Malick’s first film and its viewing experience from those that follow. The story’s narration is more plot heavy and more verbal than any of Malick’s later work. The narrative structure is the most classical, as it achieves clear closure, employs a voiceover that primarily functions as a narrator of the plot, and contains much more dialogue. In addition, his later films’ thematic concerns with the interrelation of humans, nature, and God are not revealed as clearly by *Badlands*’ construction. While Malick’s attachment to voiceover narration appears, the film displays little of his later penchant for pictorialism. In *Badlands*, Malick employs a unique extra-long shot scale (XLS) motif, typically in long takes with a static camera. The film’s viewing experience is more distanced than the films that follow it, perhaps best indicated by viewers’ ability to laugh at a character for whom Malick would later evince deeper sympathy and less humor.

Despite these choices, *Badlands* displays fundamental evidence of Malick’s burgeoning cinematic universe, as well cues for the typical viewing experience that Malick’s films go on to create, if not all of them effective in his first attempt. The film juxtaposes two separate worlds: the suburban residential area of Fort Dupree, South Dakota and the untamed wilderness of the American Northwest’s badlands. In dealing with its two leading characters, the film defines Holly as belonging to the former world,

---

\(^7\) In *The New Biographical Dictionary of Film*, David Thomson argues, "Badlands may be the most assured first film by an American since Citizen Kane." (Thompson, 2002; p. 553)
and Kit as belonging to the latter. Thus Malick’s recurring theme on the relationship among humans, nature and God surfaces through the comparisons that the film draws between Kit and the natural world. God’s presence is invoked through subtle stylistic cues upon Holly’s exit from and reentry to her suburban world, although in a manner seemingly contradictory to Malick’s subsequent arguments.

The film’s causally driven narrative structure is typical of Malick’s films, presenting its plotlines in a largely episodic fashion. The film’s episodes generally feature the characters interacting amidst their natural surroundings, which change as the film progresses. With less camera mobility, the film’s main stylistic method of presenting episodes is through an extra-long shot scale that contextualizes the characters against the landscape in the background. However, whereas later films focus more overtly on nature, the characters’ interactions in Badlands do not create clear cues for the viewer to consider the natural world in which they are set. The distinction between Fort Dupree and the badlands, and the connection between Kit and the natural world, are much more oblique expressions of Malick’s recurring themes than those portrayed in his later films.

Finally, the film employs voiceover narration that offers Holly’s point of view on the story. However, the narration does not express her character subjectivity with depth, but rather serves primarily to narrate the events of the plot. The choice to withhold Holly’s emotions may represent the film’s suggestion that viewers should invoke her emotional condition by putting themselves in her position. However, while the film is widely admired, the compassion, as well as the awe of the natural world, that
Malick’s later films design to effect in their viewing experiences are less common in viewers’ experiences of *Badlands*.

**Theme**

Malick’s recurring themes appear only subtly in *Badlands*, playing a smaller role in the film’s choices about narrative structure and stylistic design. Rather than bringing the themes to the forefront, *Badlands* uses them as descriptive tools. *Badlands* adapts the Charles Starkweather murder spree as the vehicle for Malick’s cinematic interests. The film juxtaposes American suburbia in the late 1950s, and the badlands through which Holly and Kit escape. Malick experiments with his interest in the relationship among humans, nature, and God through the film’s depiction of each world and the characters’ decisions within them. *Badlands*’ themes do not make a central argument that questions or defines that relationship as is increasingly the case with the films that follow it. But the presences of nature and God evidence the emergence of those themes in Malick’s creative consciousness.

*Badlands*’ presentation is characterized by the same mythic grandeur as *Days of Heaven*, *The Thin Red Line*, and *The New World*. However, in each of the later films, the story itself is an American legend, either generically or historically. Although an infamous crime spree, the Charles Starkweather murders are hardly as ingrained in American cultural memory as the love affair between John Smith and Pocahontas. Instead of choosing a defining story of American history, *Badlands* enhances its story through the tone and scale of its presentation. The film’s attitude towards the Starkweather character is one of admiration, even on the parts of the police characters
in his supposed pursuit (segment 9). The film designs Kit as a James Dean look-alike, both visually and in the assured air of his performance. But different from a film like *Bonnie and Clyde*, the film is not named after its leading outlaw couple. The film is entitled *Badlands* – a natural region of the American Northwest, on the edges of civilized society, the world into which the film draws Kit and Holly. The badlands’ untamed wilderness, the desert’s void of human life, earns the film its mythic qualities. Viewers often liken *Badlands* to a fairytale. The film’s fairytale tone results in part from the childish imagery of Kit and Holly domestically performing as a 1950s married couple, against an unlikely canvas of northwestern terrain.

The film juxtaposes its two worlds through characters in the plot that escape from one world to be in love in another. The narrative exiles Holly and Kit from society and propels them into a world governed by nature, revealing a wildness in Kit that he shares with his surroundings. However, at the end of segment 6, after a brief reentry into civilization, Holly’s character says about the society to which she used to belong, “The world was like a faraway planet to which I could never return...I thought what a fine place it was.” Her observation articulates the vast distance between the badlands Holly and Kit inhabit and society at large, and furthermore that she prefers the latter to the former. The moment is a turning point in her character’s plotline, and the film articulates the pivotal moment by phrasing it in terms of the world to which the narrative relegates her and the world for which she longs. This contrast between worlds appears in all of Terrence Malick’s films, although the subsequent three favor the world less oppressed by civilized conventions.
Without drawing the attention to nature that *The Thin Red Line* or even *Days of Heaven* later draws, the film uses the natural world to reflect the increasingly lost and desperate condition of its characters. As is evident from the film’s title, nature plays a key role in the depiction of the place through which Holly and Kit try to escape – from its lushness in segment 4, to its barren conditions by segment 8. The visual transition in the badlands over time mimics the state of the characters’ relationship. In segment 4, the characters are most deeply in love, and richly surrounded by nature and its resources. The pair has no trouble constructing a life that closely imitates the average 1950s newlywed couple that moves to the suburbs, except into a tree house rather than a dream house. However, the violent events of their plotline continue to drive them farther and farther away from nature’s bounties. Furthermore, by segment 7, the characters’ relationship has deteriorated considerably. Whereas they once lived in an elaborate bungalow in the trees, in this segment Holly and Kit appear in a scene that portrays them cooking on a tiny campfire against the desert’s vast emptiness. From the viewer’s perspective, nature’s stinginess corresponds with the faded sheen of the couple’s romance.

Malick’s films’ thematic attitudes toward nature frequently appear linked to certain characters and not to others. In *Badlands*, Holly and Kit’s physical appearances and behavior often contrast with the wilderness, highlighting them as distinct products of their world in Fort Dupree. However, Holly’s respect for civilization distinguishes her from Kit’s instinctive disregard for the law, identifying his character’s parallel with the rough country that they inhabit. The notion that Kit belongs to the nature of the
badlands appears most overtly in segment 7. With a 360° pan, the camera displays the whole wild horizon before resting on Kit, as he tries to discern the direction in which the characters should proceed. As he looks around, the film cuts to animals on the mesa around him – a guinea fowl, an iguana, an eagle – perched in exactly the same stance, as a visual comparison. In general, the film does not accentuate comparison between Kit and a wild animal, unlike Malick’s later pictures. But the subtle connection between the characters’ natures and the natural world evidences Malick’s early interest in the relationship between humans and nature.

Of the three entities Malick’s films’ continually strive to interrelate, Badlands’ evidences the presence of God most subtly. The film uses religious themes to characterize two significant events in the plot: burning down the Sargis’ house (segment 3), and Holly’s surrender (segment 8). The plot events mark Holly’s break from and return to civilized society. Each of these events invokes religiosity, through the compositions’ recreation of religious iconography and the use of choral music, in order to dramatically punctuate the moment’s presentation. The film’s thematic use of style implicates the former act as punishable by hellfire, and the latter act as deliverance from sin. However, the religious characterization of these events is somewhat inconsistent with later works’ arguments about Malick’s recurring themes. Malick’s later films suggest that the natural world evinces God’s presence, and criticize the structures of human civilization. The connection between the characters’ actions and their religious implications suggests a closer relationship between what Badlands condemns and what human civilization outlaws.
The recurring themes in Malick’s body of work do not surface in *Badlands* as prominently as they do in his later films. *Badlands* illustrates two worlds in opposition, one characterized by human civilization, the other characterized by uncivilized land. Nature’s omnipresence, whether lush or barren, distinguishes the badlands into which Kit and Holly flee, and illustrates the shifting condition of their romance over time. The film characterizes Kit as belonging more to the badlands’ world than does Holly, who comes to yearn for civilization. Religion punctuates key moments in the plot in order to maximize their dramatic effect as turning points into and out of the badlands. From these understated experiments with theme, Malick goes on to elevate his thematic interest in the interrelation of humans, nature and God into substantive content in his films, with more specific questions and arguments.

**Narrative**

*Badlands*’ narrative displays certain distinctions described below, but strong evidence of the typical narrative structure that define Malick’s subsequent films. *Badlands* distinguishes its story from traditional renditions of the Starkweather murders, designing viewers to sympathize with, rather than to scorn, Kit’s character throughout the film. The overarching narrative is causally driven by Kit’s escape from the law to live freely with Holly, but the structure organizes its plotlines in a largely episodic fashion by virtue of Kit and Holly’s inexact destination. The narrative is distinctive from Malick’s later work for the function of its voiceover narration and the narrative’s pace. Holly’s voiceover functions more conventionally than do later instances of voiceover narration, serving the plot rather than the film’s central themes.
or her own subjectivity. The plot’s reliance on voiceover narration, in addition to the surplus of dialogue compared to subsequent films, results in the film’s relative excess of verbiage. Holly characteristically provides more information than viewers need to construct the plot’s main events. The narrative structure accommodates the information by creating a specific pace in which intervals of concentrated plot narration follow episodes that do not feature Holly’s voiceover or contribute to the plot’s forward movement. The episodes illustrate Kit and Holly’s relationship as it changes over time, from its romantic peak to Holly’s ultimate disenchantment. Despite the episodic plot’s apparent deviation from a causally driven narrative, Badlands’ episodes build towards a climactic plot event: Holly’s decision to stop running (segment 8). The narrative structure reflects Malick’s ideals for the viewing experience by encouraging viewers to look beyond the characters’ plotlines and notice the beauty in the natural world.

Although Badlands’ narrative resembles the typical narrative structure of Malick’s films, its structure bears a salient thematic distinction. Badlands spends its full first act, segments 1 – 3, in the world from which Holly and Kit run away. The films that follow Badlands minimally depict the characters’ places of origin, emphasizing the world discovered rather than the world left behind. In this film the extended presence of the characters’ origins works in service of audience alliance. As a result of her voiceover narration, and the voiceover’s function, the film presents the story with Holly’s point of view. However, initially with the help of Holly’s point of view, the film designs viewers to sympathize with Kit – even after Holly decides to leave him. Apart
from Holly’s decision to submit to the police, as with viewers, Holly’s passive participation in the plot is only as a witness. Kit’s character is the agent of the plot’s progress. Because of Kit’s violent actions and impenetrable exterior, the first act in Fort Dupree serves viewers’ ability to align with him. The first act establishes his character’s goals in conflict with Holly’s father before Kit commits any crimes. The time spent in Fort Dupree justifies Kit’s first murder as a necessary evil to enable his plotline with Holly. His plotline with Holly is more sympathetic, thus encouraging viewer alliance, than his plotline as a criminal.

As Holly and Kit can never remain in one place for very long, the plot poses obstacles to the film’s comprehensive depiction of two opposite worlds. The narrative structure deals with its plot obstacles in certain segments by alternating intervals in which the plot advances rapidly with episodes in which the plot does not advance at all. The narrative’s juxtapositions encourage viewers to experience moments in the film’s sumptuous and enigmatic natural environment unbound by classical plot expectations. For instance, in segment 2, the narrative expeditiously narrates Kit and Holly’s falling in love through voiceover, over a sequence of selected shots from their romance. Consequently, the plot halts its forward movement for a scene in which the characters share an insignificant conversation in which Kit points out a tree that has collapsed into the brook. However, the episode dwells in a particular space and time for the scene’s duration, exerting comparatively less control over what the viewer sees and knows. A classical narrative structure likely would reverse this technique, eliding inessential story information and more extensively depicting the main characters’
falling in love. In *Badlands*, the narration’s rhythm cues viewers to imbue the episodes that punctuate plot sequences with the information that those sequences provide.

Liberated from the plot, the episodes provide opportunities for viewers to enter a moment of Holly and Kit’s environment. In scenes that are steeped in setting, exemplified by Kit’s pointing out the collapse of an enormous tree, the narrative structure encourages viewers to appreciate the film’s portrayal of nature, even if so minimally as to reflect, “The tree makes it nice,” (segment 3). The narrative structure presents plot sequences as though advancing toward the subsequent episode’s momentary pause in the film’s reality. The technique encourages viewers to engage more freely with the film’s world, offering but not limiting the viewer to classical sources of viewing pleasure.

To achieve these moments in nature, *Badlands*’ narrative structure relies on voiceover narration to serve the plot. Among all of Malick’s voiceovers, Holly’s functions the most conventionally. As aforementioned, she narrates events from the story that are elided onscreen, or summarizes those sequences that present the plot in an abridged manner. Her voiceover’s first appearance in segment 1 exemplifies the device’s function more generally in the film. The film opens with a long take of Holly alone in her bedroom, scratching her dog on her four-poster bed, while in voiceover Holly narrates:

“My mother died of pneumonia when I was just a kid. My father kept their wedding cake in the freezer for ten whole years. After the funeral, he gave it to the yardman. He tried to act cheerful but he could never be consoled by the little stranger he found in his house. Then one day, hoping to begin a new life away from the scene of all his memories, he moved us from Texas to Fort Dupree, South Dakota,” (segment 1).
As the film visually introduces viewers to Holly and her world, her voiceover locates the viewer in the time and space of the film in a characteristically dramatic and occasionally irrelevant fashion. The voiceover functions to fill in the background of Holly’s character elided until the film’s story begins.

Although the film’s voiceover narration most commonly serves a classical narrator function, its occasionally experimental use brings into focus Malick’s creative use of the device. Parallel to the narrative structure, Holly’s narration is typically as digressive as it is plot driven. Her voiceover contributes meaningless information that serves her characterization as often as it provides concrete narration of the plot. Furthermore, Holly’s voiceover often appears to describe exactly what appears onscreen and nothing more. For instance, segment 7 features the following narration:

“In the distance, I saw a train makin’ its way silently across the plain like the caravan in the adventures of Marco Polo. It was our first taste of civilization in weeks and I asked Kit if I could have a closer look. Before we left he shot a football that he considered excess baggage. Afterwards, he took and buried some of our things in a bucket...”

The narration is episodic, for the most part describing insignificant events from the daily life of their journey. Further, the narration contributes no new information. The narration appears over a sequence that features a shot of a train passing in an extra-long shot, Kit shooting a football, and burying assorted belongings underground. At first glance, the voiceover’s purpose in the segment appears to be a characterizing one, depicting a certain meandering apathy in Holly. This misconception, a common
reaction among viewers, is why some walk away from the film viewing Holly’s character as estranged from the violent events of the plot.\(^8\)

Demystifying the unromantic fate of Kit’s path is integral to the direction of the plot. The film must therefore convey the painful solitude of life on the run in the most painless way possible for viewers, which it accomplishes through Holly’s voiceover narration of seemingly meaningless details. Voiceover narration such as the example featured above is not intended to characterize Holly, but rather to solve a cinematic obstacle. The most overt clue to its function appears with less direct representation onscreen, when Holly describes seeing a train as “our first taste of civilization in weeks,” (segment 7). The voiceover’s meaningless, unselective content conveys to viewers the mundane, tiresome reality of living on the run that Holly’s character discovers. The choice to depict her character’s discovery in this way, with voiceover atop a summary sequence of shots, expedites the time spent conveying the characters’ boredom, as well as establishing the story’s place in time. The narration exposes Kit’s fate as one of painful solitude at best, without inviting the viewers’ boredom by more fully portraying those frustrating weeks.

The estrangement many viewers ascribe to Holly’s reactions is endemic to the style in which Malick approached her character. In perhaps the only interview Malick has given over the course of his career, he said about his characters in Badlands,

> “Holly’s Southerness is essential to taking her right. She isn’t indifferent about her father’s death. She might have cried buckets of tears, but she wouldn’t think of telling you about it. It wouldn’t be proper. You should always feel there are large parts of her experience she is not including because she has a strong, if misplaced, sense of

\(^8\) Pauline Kael misguidedly described of Badlands, “Malick is, of course, telling us they’re empty...I found its cold detachment offensive.” (Kael, 1995; p. 306)
propriety...Kit...is a closed book, not a rare trait in people who have tasted more than their fair share of bitterness in life. The movies have kept up a myth that suffering makes you deep. It inclines you to say deep things...People who’ve suffered go around in movies with long, thoughtful faces, as though everything had caved in just yesterday. It’s not that way in real life though, not always. Suffering can make you shallow, and just the opposite of vulnerable, dense.”

Malick chooses to give voiceover narration, a classically subjective device, to a girl for whom it would be uncharacteristic to express her inner emotional condition. To understand why the film allocates the voiceover to Holly’s character rather than to Kit’s, one need only consider the effect of the opposite choice. The film characterizes Kit by his instincts, not his emotional reactions or thought processes. He says a great deal in the film’s dialogue, which is similarly unemotional, because he says what he thinks just as he does what he feels. Had Kit’s voiceover narrated the film, it could have been interesting in a whole new way in the hands of a more subjective director. However, Malick presents characters with distinct points of view, but whose subjectivity does not alter the story or shape its stylistic presentation. Kit’s version of the story would be conceivably far less in touch with the film’s reality than Holly’s understanding of it, as she bears a greater degree of self-awareness than the total self-delusion evident in Kit. The voiceover device characterizes Holly and her worldview through the nature of the things she chooses to include. However, employing a character’s voiceover to narrate a criminal plotline, without giving voice to her subjective reactions to it, begs those emotions to find expression through alternative

---

9 Walker, 1974; p.82. Those who write about Malick quote this interview, featured in Sight and Sound magazine after the release of Badlands, too exhaustively. Given his refusal to give interviews thenceforth, one can imagine how he felt about his representation in this interaction. But his perspective on this small angle of the film is a particularly informative one, if its execution in the film is only partially successful.
stylistic means. The film’s occasional use of pictorialism is aptly suited to such an opportunity, later discussed.

Although Badlands’ narrative structure does not reveal Malick’s recurring themes in a prominent fashion, the film successfully solves cinematic obstacles caused by its plot. The film includes a lengthier exposition of the Forth Dupree space than its equivalents in Malick’s later films until The New World. The choice encourages viewers to view Kit’s character sympathetically in spite of his actions, Malick’s goal for his films’ viewing experiences. The narrative paces its story’s narration to allow for episodes in which viewer’s access the film’s environment in a less controlled fashion. From the exposition of the characters’ natural setting in episodes, the film strengthens its sense of space despite the continually shifting location. In conjunction with the film’s use of style, the choice suggests the badlands as a unified natural space juxtaposed to Fort Dupree. Finally, Holly’s voiceover narrates the plot in a more conventional fashion than do later film’s voiceovers. However, her voiceover frequently digresses to include extraneous plot details that contribute no new information to the film. The choice to include these details suggests the unglamorous fate ahead of Holly and Kit, without taking the time to portray the mundane details of their solitude. The suggestion explains Holly’s decision to turn herself in to the police. Although the film includes a comparatively greater amount of spoken narration, in voiceover and in dialogue, the film’s suggestions to viewers rely equally upon the function of style.
Style

*Badlands*’ stylistic choices are distinct among Malick’s films from the less prominent influence of his recurring themes. While the film employs Malick’s trademark tool of voiceover narration, pictorialism appears less frequently than in later films, and he relies to a much lesser extent on the use of mobile camera. However, *Badlands* is typical Malick in its use of style to encourage viewers to divide their attention between characters’ plotlines and the film’s depiction of the natural world. The main stylistic tool with which the film prompts this effect is the film’s unique extra-long shot (XLS) motif. Malick pulls viewers back, literally through the camera position but figuratively in their viewing experience, in order to expand their focus to the whole world in which the film’s story takes place – of which the characters’ plotlines are only one part. However, in choosing this device to effect the viewers’ awe of nature, the film inhibits the alternate viewing experience for which Malick’s later films strive: compassion for the characters. While the film does not suggest that viewers should feel anything other than sympathetically toward Holly and Kit, neither does it employ the subjective devices that his later films use to draw viewers closer to the characters’ experiences.

The film’s XLS motif is designed to provoke viewers’ awe of the natural world. The motif encourages this effect in conjunction with long takes with a static camera, as the design allows viewers to absorb the full extent of its shot’s compositions. For example, in segment 2, Kit and Holly play cards and discuss the scenery. Presented in an XLS static long take, the film encourages viewers to consider the setting’s natural
surroundings, providing ample time to examine the tree in the center of the shot and the brook that runs down the left side of the frame. Although the narrative transports the characters to a variety of locations across the American northwest, the XLS motif contextualizes the characters against the setting’s backdrop of landscape. The shared shot scale presentation of the film’s locations creates a more unified sense of the badlands’ space as an alternate world to Fort Dupree.

However, as exemplified by the shot in segment 2, Malick often employs a static long take where classical filmmakers might employ a shot reverse shot editing pattern. The shot scale’s visual scope, particularly for the duration of long takes, minimizes the impact of the characters’ dialogue that a more conventional cutting pattern would provide. The effects of the design are two-fold: First, although the film relies more heavily on spoken narration than Malick’s subsequent films, its minimal use of shot reverse shot editing lessens the impact of its verbiage. The strength of the film’s cinematic devices subordinates the screenplay. Second, the extra long shot scale creates a greater distance between characters and viewers. Whereas Malick’s later films go on increasingly to make use of character subjectivity to guide their story’s narration in a more intimate fashion, the XLS motif inhibits viewers’ opportunity to see from the characters’ point of view. Thus, in creating one desired effect in inspiring the viewers’ awe of the natural world, the film inhibits another desired effect of the viewer’s compassion for characters.

However, the XLS shot motif occasionally provides the rare cues in Badlands that encourage viewers’ compassion, connecting with Holly by considering her
character’s experience without viewing the experience onscreen. In segment 7, when Holly delivers her character’s most forthcoming voiceover, with confessions such as,

“He needed me now more than ever, but something had come between us. I’d stopped even payin’ attention to him. Instead, I sat in the car and read a map and spelled out entire sentences with my tongue on the roof of my mouth where nobody could read ‘em.”

The film supplements the intimacy of her narration with an XLS montage of their car crossing the mesa. The film pulls back the camera position, over shots of the landscape rather than of her character, at the point of Holly’s most private exchanges with Kit and the audience. The cause of those emotions is not hidden from viewers, even though it is not displayed onscreen. Instead, the film prompts viewers to fill in what they cannot see through feeling compassion for Holly, encouraging the viewer to consider her character’s experience on a more personal level. The segment includes strikingly beautiful compositions of light, color and landscape, the way in which the car alters the frame, once wiping free a heard of cattle and leaving only smoke and dust in its place. Thus, in addition, does the segment provoke the viewer’s awe of the natural world. The segment’s encouragement of both empathy and awe employs different stylistic devices than is typical of Malick’s later films. But Badlands’ cues evidence Malick’s early interest in the specific viewing experience.

As with the general scarcity of cues for viewers’ empathy, the thematic presence of God in Badlands is minimal. However, the film stylizes two events in the plot with religious references. To do so, Malick employs two leading stylistic tools: Badlands’ soundtrack and its compositions’ religious iconography. His use of the former device is unique to Badlands, while the latter prefigures the more overt iconography in Days of
Heaven. These techniques imbue religiosity at the points in the narrative when Holly breaks from and returns to society, respectively characterizing the events as a condemnation and a deliverance from evil. The Sargis’ burning house augurs the presentation of hellfire that Days of Heaven depicts in its wheat fire (segment 3).

Badlands presents an extended sequence in which each shot depicts a different room ravaged by flames, as well as a shot of Mr. Sargis’ body. When Holly surrenders to the police helicopter, Malick composes the scene’s final shot from a low angle, as Holly appears to ascend into a beam of light like an angel being raised towards the sky (segment 8). Both scenes are united by the presence of Carl Orff’s choral music in the soundtrack. The music is distinct from the rest of the soundtrack, which ranges from Eric Satie to pop songs, for its period style and grave, foreboding tone. Although they are difficult to decipher, the lyrics are unambiguously religious,

“When Jesus walked into the garden, and his suffering began, everything mourned that was there, even the foliage and the green grass. Mary held a small bell, ringing, oh my darling darling child, oh how, oh how my heart is breaking, my son, my son I am losing you. Mary went to the cross, she saw her dear child hanging before her, there he was hanging on a cross, Mary's heart was in pain,” (segment 3).

Alone, the choral music in each scene would not necessarily indicate the film’s intention to imbue those instances with a certain religious profundity. However, when choral music about Jesus’ suffering scores a sequence thrashed by flames in the first instance, and a shot of Holly ascending into beams of light from the sky in the second instance, the film’s stylistic message is clear. The biblical nature of these moments does not take central focus in the depictions of these events in the way that the plague of locusts in Days of Heaven creates a biblical plot event. However, the religious bases for
the stylistic punctuation of key narrative events, in an otherwise wholly unreligious film, prefigure the godly curiosity espoused in Malick’s later films.

Because Malick has not yet revealed his thematic interests with a clear meaning or set of possible meanings, Badlands’ use of pictorialism is minimal. When pictorial shots appear, they derive meaning from the film’s narrative rather than from a particular argument about the relationship among humans, nature, and God, as will occur in Malick’s later films. Pictorialism appears only minimally in Badlands because underscoring key plot events might replicate the function of the voiceover device, and risk a heavy-handed narration of the film’s plot. Therefore, in the instances in which pictorialism appears in the film, the device serves to underscore emotions that Holly’s voiceover would not characteristically articulate.

Segment 7 features a particularly effective instance of Badlands’ pictorialism. The technique appears after the above mentioned narration in which Holly is atypically forthcoming. The ensuing pictorial shot cinematically illustrates the emotional conflict in the couple’s romance that Holly’s voiceover would never express in greater depth. In an XLS, the frame first appears in total darkness. The camera pans from screen left to right, tracing a light beam cast by their car’s headlights. The pan reveals the couple slow dancing at the edge of the car’s light, as the chorus from Nat King Cole’s The Dream Has Ended crescendos in the soundtrack:

I thought you loved me, you said you loved me, we planned together to dream forever. The dream has ended for true love died, the night a blossom fell and touched two lips that lied.
While Kit appears engrossed in the moment and Holly appears to be disenchanted, the song’s lyrics underscore the image’s meaning and identify Holly as the character who truly appreciates the couple’s reality.

The shot’s pictorialism results from the collective meaning that its stylistic devices depict. Holly and Kit’s visual isolation within the frame’s black canvas cues the viewer to consider the solitary fate into which the couple is locked. Holly’s staging in contrast with Kit’s, in addition to the music’s lyrics, physically expresses emotions far too private for her character otherwise to share: she doesn’t love him enough to keep running away with him. And yet, despite the shot’s foreboding nature from its composition, soundtrack and staging, the camera’s pan in the shot’s presentation challenges that assumption. The way in which the camera finds the characters lit up amidst a sea of darkness, beholding them from a distant shot scale, intimates the difference prescribed for viewers in their relationship to Holly and Kit as distinguished from other characters’ views of the couple. The pan imbues the composition’s cues, which otherwise suggest the characters’ doomed fate, with the same duality that is present throughout the film: the contrast between the attitude towards the couple by the other characters in the film, and the viewers’ attitude towards the couple from witnessing their romance. The solitary shot stylistically punctuates an emotional moment in the narrative by expressing visually what Holly and Kit feel but do not articulate. Kit’s character confirms this inability when, immediately preceding the shot, he says, “If I could sing a song like that. If I could sing a song about the way I feel right now. It’d be a hit.” (Segment 7)
Badlands’ use of style reflects the film’s narrative and thematic differences from Malick’s later work, but nonetheless strives for the unique viewing experience of Malick’s cinematic universe. The XLS shot motif serves to present the viewers with the beautiful landscapes across which Holly and Kit travel and to solicit viewers’ awe of the natural world. The shared motif among the locations that Holly and Kit traverse helps to unify the badlands’ disparate spaces into an alternative world to the world of Fort Dupree. The XLS shot motif typically inhibits cues for viewers’ empathy. However, the motif encourages viewers’ personal consideration of Holly’s feelings when the device accompanies Holly’s rare instances of emotionally expressive voiceover over compositions in which she is not featured. In this debut film, Malick’s recurring themes that interrelate humans, nature and God, do not appear with a fully expressed argument or set of questions. However, the film’s style conjures religiosity to enhance dramatic impact for certain significant plot events through the film’s soundtrack and religious iconography in compositions. The less than central presence of themes in Badlands corresponds to the minimal presence of pictorialism. When pictorial shots appear, they function to express emotions that would be uncharacteristic for Holly and Kit to articulate. Collectively, the style’s presentation narrative encourages viewers to view the natural world with awe. Occasionally, the film suggests that viewers should consider what emotions are absent from the story’s portrayal, a suggestion that encourages viewers’ compassion from constructing in their own heads the emotions Holly experiences.
Conclusion

*Badlands* is the Malick film for people who do not like Malick films. *Badlands* provides the most conventional set of pleasures of Malick's features, not yet diving into the natural world or the presence of God with the intensity to which his later films escalate. Nonetheless, the film’s narrative structure, its story's themes, and the burgeoning thematic presence of nature and god, debut the key traits of Malick's cinematic universe. The film introduces Malick's penchants for voiceover narration and pictorialism, although they function bound more tightly to the narrative than to its themes. *Badlands* tells a story in a fashion that is more phenomenological than psychological. While Malick does not necessarily seek to distance the viewer from his characters’ psychological motives, he indisputably does not make choices to exploit their emotions to impact the audience. The film evidences Malick's understanding that only by emphasizing an empirical set of pleasures from the film's story can viewers experience both its empirical and emotional pleasures. *Badlands* does not intend to depict the subjective pathology that drives an all-American boy to commit crimes: this is not Malick's cinematic goal. His films hunger for the landscape and view human nature only as a part of it. Rather than activate the interest of his audience by bringing them into the psyches of his complicated characters, he encourages viewers to quiet the instincts of their conventional viewing experience, and wallow in the splendor of the earth.
Chapter 2.

Days of Heaven (1978)

In Days of Heaven, the industrial inner city and the pastoral wheat fields of Texas collide with epic consequences. Three migrant workers – Bill, his little sister Linda, and his girlfriend posing as his sister, Abby – move to the Texas Panhandle to work for Chuck, a wealthy farmer. Chuck takes an interest in Abby. When Bill overhears that Chuck has only a year left to live, he encourages Abby to accept Chuck’s advances, seeing an opportunity to improve their impoverished position in life. Bill and Abby uphold the façade of brother and sister but remain in love after Chuck and Abby marry. When Chuck’s illness does not play out according to his doctor’s prediction, the outcome is nothing short of hell on earth.¹⁰

¹⁰ For a complete narrative segmentation, see Appendix.
Days of Heaven unearths the complete realization of Terrence Malick’s cinematic universe where Badlands merely suggested the possibility of such a place. The terms that define Malick’s universe are inextricably linked to the concurrent representation of the natural world and the film’s story. Camera operator John Bailey echoes this perspective, on Days of Heaven’s use of first and second-unit photography, with the observation, “Terry could take the microcosm and make it a part of the macrocosm.”\(^{11}\) Bailey’s remark speaks to the design of a dominant system in the film, larger than its leading characters’ plotlines, prescribed by Malick’s ideals as a filmmaker. Days of Heaven modifies the tactics that entrenched Badlands in its characters’ plot. Malick’s second film’s setting is confined to one predominant location, in which the film’s world entwines setting and story. In doing so, the film encourages viewers to assume Malick’s desired viewing mindset, embracing their inextricable immersion both in nature and in the plot.

As a result, the film’s argument on the relationship among humans, nature, and God, comes to light more readily than Badlands’ structure was designed to impart. Malick constructs the underlying theme of Days of Heaven to reveal the human consequences to be suffered from challenging the universe’s natural order. From his experience working with Malick, Richard Gere articulates Days of Heaven’s variation on this theme in the following way:

“The foibles of human beings who are trying to control the universe is our own madness, it’s not an inherent quality of the universe.”\(^{12}\)

---

\(^{11}\) Bailey, 2007; interview.

\(^{12}\) Gere, 2007; interview.
The film employs biblical references, evident in its title, to suggest the hellish consequences wrought on humans who attempt to tip the universe’s natural balance in their favor. In order to bring to light *Days of Heaven*'s argument on Malick’s recurring themes, from where it only was implied in *Badlands*, *Days of Heaven* primarily amends the prior film’s narrative structure.

Typical of Malick’s films, the causally driven narrative structure presents its plotlines in an episodic fashion. Furthermore, the narrative presents two opposite worlds: the industrialism of Chicago and the pastoral wheat fields of the Texas Panhandle. The narrative structure is distinct for the time spent between events that advance the plot. Two parallel components drive *Days of Heaven*'s narrative structure: the natural world’s events and the events that comprise characters’ plotlines. The environmental counterpart to the characters’ story contextualizes the plot in its setting where Holly contextualized *Badlands*’ plot in digressive story information. Instead of episodic character interactions, *Days of Heaven* develops the presentation of its environment through depictions of its plants and animals. The divergent functions of the use of voiceover in Malick’s first and second films parallel the films’ respective narrative structures. Whereas Holly’s voiceover served the plot, Linda’s voiceover comments on the farm’s world as she sees it, the plot only one among its elements.

Malick employs Linda’s character, and her voiceover’s cues, to encourage viewers to emulate her experience as a viewer of the film’s world. Accordingly, her voiceover establishes the film’s attitude toward the events of the plot and other characters, and provides a platform from which to launch the film’s themes. Among
those, evident from the film’s title, Malick introduces his ongoing experimentation with godly influences on his films’ universes. Rather than any particular morality, the film employs unconcealed biblical allusions in order to magnify its narrative climax to a cosmic scale.

Finally, the film’s divergent narrative goals alter its stylistic choices from those that Malick made in his first film. *Days of Heaven* is commonly compared to a silent film. But its perceived silence would be more accurately described as the plot’s resistance to relying on speech, as compared to *Badlands*’ verbiage, in favor of non-verbal storytelling. In *Days of Heaven*, editing functions similarly to *Badlands*’ use of voiceover, adopting a point of view cutting pattern that wordlessly evokes the characters’ story. Moreover, editing plays a central role in the assemblage of the film’s universe from its assorted natural microcosms. The Panaglide camera with which *Days of Heaven* was shot provides an essential distinction from its predecessor’s use of style. from the intensified use of camera movement with which the film illustrates its chaotic atmosphere and the characters’ inner passions.

Malick’s use of narrative, thematic and stylistic cues in *Days of Heaven* encourages viewers toward an absorption for which likeminded filmmakers strive but cannot imitate. The narrative structure’s episodic exploration of nature, nature’s stylistic portrayal, and the fierce natural disasters that define the plot’s climax, provoke viewers’ awe of the natural world. The film’s increased focus on the natural world, as compared with *Badlands*, also affects a reduction in the film’s number of plot events. Instead, *Days of Heaven* tells a story about its characters’ passions, propelled more
strongly by their emotions than their actions. The film encourages viewers to experience the story with compassion for multiple characters rather than to align with one character, positioning viewers to see larger forces as responsible for the film’s events. The film defines the viewing experience by prompting viewers’ evenhanded sympathy for the characters and their awe of the natural world.

Theme

*Days of Heaven* is the first of Malick’s films to reveal the underlying themes that drive its narrative and stylistic construction. In his second film, Malick proposes a relationship among humans, nature, and God that he varies to fit the stories told in each of his subsequent films. *Days of Heaven* explores the consequences to humans who think that they can override their fates or control the natural order of the universe in which they live. Malick does not design the film to turn the audience against these characters. Instead, Malick’s films prove that he is more interested in the causal forces that produce these characters than in suggesting that one character is responsible for the film’s events. Malick therefore constructs two worlds in his narratives, one representing an ideal and the other a failure. *Days of Heaven*’s two locations, an idyllic farm and an industrialized city, present the perfect foils for his running theme. One world explores an industry controlled by nature’s seasons, the other represents man-made progress at the expense of nature.

*Days of Heaven* predominantly sets its narrative in the thematically ideal world within the film, Chuck’s farm in rural Texas. The film designs Bill’s black, barren factory in direct contrast to Chuck’s farm. The industrial forces outpacing humans and
nature are a constant presence on the farm, without overdrawning the viewers’ attention. A prime example of machinery’s latent presence on the farm appears in the black tractor driving through the crop fire ignited to burn out the locusts, a tractor allegedly driven by Malick himself (segment 7). The film does not argue that industrialism causes poverty but that industrialism destroys nature. In Malick’s cinematic universe, when foolish humans attempt to assert disproportionate control over other natural systems, corruption results and humans and nature collide. Thus, the motivation that drives Bill and Abby’s scam for Chuck’s wealth is, thematically, no more about poverty and wealth than the plague of locusts is about morality and sin. Greed, according to this film, is a function of Bill and Abby’s upbringing in an industrial, unnatural world. Chuck’s character takes gentler actions and displays comparatively more sympathetic emotions until burned by the forces driving Abby and Bill. At that point, Chuck displays wrath. The biblical inferences from the characters’ plotlines are designed to draw together, with the aid of Linda’s voiceover, human and nature in the film’s plot.

The godly events that transpire in *Days of Heaven* evidence the first instance in which Malick’s recurring theme interrelates humans, nature and presence of God. In creating the film’s complete universe – from its plants, animals, and seasons to the humans’ plotlines – Malick suggests a celestial cosmic presence through his overt references to the bible. The film’s title, drawing immediate attention to its biblical themes before any hint that his climax will involve such direct reference, appeals to a bible verse that specifically describes human life on earth:
“That your days may be multiplied, and the days of your children, in the land which the Lord swore unto your fathers to give them, as the days of heaven upon the earth.”

As in Malick’s subsequent films, the concepts of god and nature are intimately linked. In fact, Linda’s voiceover narration in segment 1 suggests that biblical references will play a part in the film’s universe concurrently with the characters’ introduction to the farm in the film’s universe. God’s presence characterizes *Days of Heaven*’s central argument that cautions humans not to tip the natural balance in the film’s overall universe. The film makes no more specific argument for the connection among humans, nature and God, as do Malick’s later themes in *The Thin Red Line* and *The New World*.

**Narrative**

The narrative structures of Malick’s first two films share more in common with each other than either one shares with a classical structure’s conventions. However, *Days of Heaven* presents those shared elements in ways that are fundamentally distinct from *Badlands*. First, while the film’s narrative includes time that exists outside of a typical cause and effect relationship to its plot, that time is not devoted predominantly to narrative episodes involving its characters. Second, the film’s voiceover does not function as a narrator of the plot. The cues provided by Linda’s voiceover narration function to encourage viewers to see the film’s characters sympathetically, as well as to introduce and sustain the film’s themes. Finally, while its narrative retells an American legend that presents two worlds in opposition to one another, *Days of Heaven*

---

13 Deut., King James Bible; 11:21
transitions to the second world shortly after the credit sequence, while *Badlands* remains in the first world for the plot’s full first act.

*Days of Heaven* reveals themes with greater ease partially as a result of its plot’s simplicity. *Badlands* approached its plot’s comparative density by expediting its events in narrated sequences, and invoking theme primarily through its narrative episodes. *Days of Heaven* moves from one plot event to the next at a constant pace, more seamlessly weaving together plot events and events unrelated to the plot. The story derives its narrative causality from two concurrent sources: the advance of the leading characters’ plotlines and the naturally determined progress of time on the Texas farm.

For example, unlike a tighter classical structure of plot events, a full eight minutes pass after Bill, Abby and Linda arrive on Chuck’s farm (segment 1) and before Chuck first takes interest in Abby (segment 2). In that time, the narrative moves forward according to the agricultural setting, introducing the space of the farm, its plants and animals, and the daily lives of its farm hands. While the film’s leading characters appear in these shots, the shots do not function in service of their plotlines. Instead, the narrative’s space between plot events establishes the prominent role of the setting in which the narrative takes place – Chuck’s farm in the Texas Panhandle. Unless one should argue that the ducks and blades of wheat that often occupy the screen between plot events constitute character interactions as defined by *Days of Heaven*, the film’s narrative structure is distinct from its predecessor’s. The film appears more specifically to employ episodes as natural counterparts to the humans’ foibles in the film’s total universe.
Although the narrative divides between time spent in the natural world and time devoted to characters’ advancing plotlines, the narrative structure maintains a consistent pace. No one scene is particularly plot heavy. The narrative’s scenes are short – none so long as the dialogue-laden scenes that appear in Badlands – lasting for no more than a few shots. Scenes typically depict moments from the world that Malick creates onscreen, moments long enough that viewers have some sense of the story’s change over time. Of all of the possible moments Malick could select with which to convey a certain narrative event, those that he chooses are notably unconventional, resisting archetypical angles to portray a particular story event. Bill’s interaction with his foreman in the first scene is a good example of this trend – viewers need know nothing more about the argument between Bill and the foreman than that it occurs, and that it is sufficiently severe that Bill flees the factory. The presentation of plot events in this manner helps the characters’ experiences to appear smaller than the film as a whole, simply one of the many natural systems that the film depicts, trying only more doggedly to assert its superiority. Furthermore, the brevity of the narrative’s scenes encourages viewers to allow their emotions to guide their narrative experience. Rather than allowing viewers to adopt a fact-based understanding of the film’s story, the film provides viewers with only enough cues to know what a scene implies, and prompts viewers to fill in what the film does not depict. The film often presents the passage of time through a montage of glimpses, any one of which a classical narrative might have presented in full.
Days of Heaven’s story is typical of those that appear in Malick’s subsequent films in that it retells an American legend, here bearing the generic markers of a Western. In addition to its southwestern setting, the film invokes the industrial imagery of so-called progress commonly mythologized, and sometimes criticized, in the Western genre. However, as with The Thin Red Line, The New World, and even Badlands, Days of Heaven retells its legend with an emphasis on Malick’s films’ recurrent themes. Through the Western’s generic tenets, Malick proposes a relationship among humans, nature and God. The narrative juxtaposes the natural order of its majestic western setting with its characters’ drive for economic progress, and characterizes the implications of the conflict between the two as biblical in proportion. Thus, in common with Malick’s other films, the narrative presents two separate worlds with contrasting principles, juxtaposing entrenched urban poverty with the pastoral innocence of the bucolic southwest.

The film sufficiently characterizes both of its worlds in order to draw this juxtaposition, despite the minimal time that the plot remains set in Chicago. Whereas Badlands’ plot remained in Fort Dupree for its entire first act, Abby, Bill and Linda depart from Chicago less than five minutes from the start of the film’s credit sequence. Days of Heaven makes possible its abbreviated exposition of the urban world by pioneering the credit sequence’s function as viable storytelling time, providing the main exposition of Chicago’s industrialization and its consequences. Under the credit titles appears a photographic montage of turn-of-the-century and tenement life. Linda, the speaker of the film’s voiceover, appears in the sequence’s final photograph. Her
image imbeds her character in the urban world and posits the montage as representative of her character’s background. In addition, the credit sequence establishes the film’s approach to storytelling. Like the credit sequence, the film constructs a location through a compilation of its various attributes, in turn proceeding to the characters’ plotlines as one of that location’s defining components. *Days of Heaven* creates the artifice of having presented a world of unnatural urban poverty, but in fact presents only one brief exterior shot of Chicago, directly after the credits. The comparative use of the film’s credits reflects the divergent emphases between *Badlands* and *Days of Heaven*, from a character driven narrative to situational story. *Days of Heaven* is a situational story in that it is the product of its circumstances, as well as a story that presents the confrontation between two natural states. The narrative’s opening scenes solidify the characterization of the industrial world, before expeditiously repositioning viewers in an alternate world, the story’s principal setting.

First, the film presents three main protagonists – Bill, Abby and Linda – and then their characters’ common motivation, to improve their lot in life. As Bill says, “Just gotta get fixed up first. Things aren't always gonna be this way,” (segment 1). Then the film introduces Linda’s voiceover narration, and with it the final characterization of the urban world.

The film’s voiceover narration serves multiple purposes that distinguish the device from Holly’s voiceover in *Badlands*. Linda’s voiceover encourages viewers to adopt sympathetic attitudes toward the characters, and imbues the film’s universe with its biblical theme. Unlike Holly’s, Linda’s voiceover does not narrate the film’s plot, as
her character does not play a central role in its events. Instead, in its first appearance, her voiceover guides viewers to see Bill more generously than his actions may have inspired, chiming in as soon as he inflicts an ambiguously mortal injury upon the factory overseer. As soon as Bill runs out of the factory, Linda’s voiceover begins to paint her brother’s loveable portrait:

“Me and my brother, it just used to be me and my brother. We used to do things together, we used to have fun...He used to juggle apples. He used to amuse us. He used to entertain us.”

Linda sets up Bill’s positive characterization as though it consequently deteriorates, but no qualifying description ever follows. Instead, the tragic events of the plot follow, spurred on mostly by Bill’s deceptive scheme. Linda’s recurrent voiceover encourages the audience to view the film’s characters with compassion, rather than to attribute blame to any one character. Her voiceover later treats Chuck’s character with the same sympathy, preventing viewers from experiencing his character as an antagonist. Sam Shepard, who played Chuck in the film, said of Malick’s own point of view on the story,

“I don't think Terry's so interested in the morality, the right and wrong. It's the predicament, it's the situation. It's the contrast between the manipulative, big city corruption and this innocence. You know that all of these little people, all these characters are doomed. They're just doomed.”

Through Linda’s voiceover, the film cues viewers to understand its tragic plot events as too large to ascribe to any one character’s wrongdoings. Rather than fault its characters, the film’s narration deflects causal responsibility to a larger malignant trend: the industrialized world’s apocalyptic forces.

---

14 Shepard, 2007; interview.
The film juxtaposes its two worlds in a thematic parallel to its characters’ plotlines. The film characterizes industrialization for its lack of nature, with a point of view that presents the industrial destruction of the natural world as catastrophic. Beyond ingratiating the film’s individual characters to viewers, Linda’s voiceover is the main tool with which the film underscores the nefarious influence of the industrialized world. The second function of Linda’s voiceover narration takes hold as promptly as its first in segment 1, as she concurrently describes her community’s destitution and her brother’s kinship:

“We used to roam the streets. Saw people suffering in pain and hunger. Some people their tongues were hangin’ outta their mouth.”

Through Linda’s voiceover, the film characterizes her world in Chicago as hellish, and furthermore, as unnatural. In Chicago, nature appears only in the flames fed in the factory, and the plucked flowers in Bill’s apartment.

Linda’s description of Chicago closely resembles her voiceover’s subsequent illustration of the Day of the Apocalypse. Escaping Chicago, Linda goes on to narrate her version of the scripture with few consequences more devastating than those that she saw in Chicago,

“Flames’ll come out of here and there, they’ll just rise up. The mountains are gonna go up in big flames, the water’s gonna rise in flames. There’s gonna be creatchus runnin’ every which way, some of them burnt, half their wings burnin’. People are gonna be screamin’ and hollerin’ for help,” (segment 1).

The film depicts the apocalypse as ruinous, but particularly ruinous to the natural world. Linda’s character does not draw the connection between the horrors predicted in the bible and the horrors that characterized her childhood. But the proximity of the
two descriptions in her narration cues viewers to relate the atrocities of industrial Chicago to the work of the devil. The voiceover provides the film’s stage from which to reveal its unique stance on Malick’s recurrent themes.

The causally driven narrative diverges from a classical structure in the episodic presentation of the story’s natural surroundings. Certain sections of the film organize the narrative classically, such that each scene occurs as the effect of a prior scene’s causation. The narrative arranges segment 8, the plot’s afterword of sorts, almost entirely in this fashion. However, the narrative equally depicts time that passes according to the seasonal turnover of nature, such as Bill’s year away from the farm in segment 6. By presenting humans’ actions and acts of nature as concomitant causal forces, the film lays the foundation within its universe for the climax’s believability. Even scenes such as Bill’s self-thwarted attempt to shoot Chuck on a hunting trip appear to be internally mirrored by nature in the near identical staging of the hunting dogs to the characters hunting (segment 6). The murderous impulse in Bill, however, is unique to the human experience, once again representing the inherently human foolish proclivity to commit unnatural acts. The narrative’s correlative plotlines entwine the presentation of nature and humans in the film’s viewing experience, laying the film’s foundation for the narrative climax in segment 7, in which the film brings the presence of God, its third thematic component, into play.

Malick’s unambiguous choice to invoke the Bible is manifested in the film’s plague of locusts. The film’s use of voiceover to imbue apocalyptic themes from the outset, as early as Linda’s opening description of urban poverty, primes viewers’
expectations for the film to stage apocalyptic events. Linda’s voiceover unites the narrative’s correlative presentations of characters’ plotlines and episodic sequences of nature under a broader biblical theme. The narrative’s representation of both humans and nature reduces the plot events the film undertakes from Badlands’, instead telling a story driven by its characters’ passions – even deadly sins. Days of Heaven illustrates the natural world in a coherent presentation of one space, providing viewers with a greater sense of the location’s involvement in the story than the one effected by Badlands’ depictions. Days of Heaven remains in Chicago only long enough to characterize Bill and Abby as the products of a larger malignant trend. The film encourages viewers to respond to the film’s characters with compassion and employs Linda’s voiceover to function instructively from the film’s attitudes.

Style

Days of Heaven’s stylistic presentation results in large part from Malick’s decision effectively to scrap the film he shot during production. According to Gere,

"We shot a much more richly verbal movie, with much more high emotions let's say, much more highly dramatic...in the end, Terry was as interested in watching the ducks in the water as he was in us walking down the road...The game he was after was much more elusive than that."15

Days of Heaven’s pared down plot, division of narrative between characters’ plotlines and nature, and diminished presence of Holly’s digressive story information, result in the expanded role of style in the film’s storytelling. The key device that the film employs, apart from its aforementioned use of voiceover, appears in the film’s editing – the natural result of Malick’s attempt to make a new story in the editing room from the

15 Gere, 2007; interview.
one he shot during production. The film primarily uses of point-of-view editing to
narrate its plot. In addition, the film employs a palpable increase in camera movement,
a bold use of natural light, and an unconventional use of sound. Although not as part
of a larger motif, Malick’s penchant for the extra long shot scale makes frequent
appearance, in opposition to the extreme close-ups with which the film draws attention
to the onset of locusts. Style functions in tandem with the film’s narrative to guide the
viewer’s experience toward an appreciation of the story’s larger causal forces rather than
to view its characters as the sole culpable agents for the narrative’s events.

Point-of-view shots play a particularly prominent role in the film’s storytelling.
The device is a useful one for Malick because, by editing subjectively, he can tell the
story through images rather than words – a goal each of his films share after Badlands.
For example, Chuck's passion for Abby and Bill's scam to inherit Chuck’s wealth
comprise the film’s two most important plot lines. Malick constructs Chuck's initial
interest and then ongoing passion for Abby simply through his POV shots of her in
segments 2 and 3. By editing for Chuck's subjectivity in these instances, Malick
establishes Chuck’s character’s side of the romantic conflict that emerges for Abby
between Chuck and Bill. Chuck's POV shots become a motif through which to
construct the three characters’ romantic plotline. Malick returns to editing for Chuck's
subjectivity with his POV shots in segments 5 and 6, when Chuck suspects and then
discovers the secret of Bill and Abby’s romance. The editing motif conveys Chuck’s
perspective to viewers, a presentation that encourages viewers’ compassion for Chuck
rather than to view him as an antagonist, establishing the motif before the rise of the plot’s dramatic tension.

While in the first and third acts POV editing cuts primarily for Chuck’s perspective, Malick similarly involves Bill in the motif for the film’s second act. After Chuck and Abby marry, Bill's character assumes longing POV shots of Abby. Particularly in segment 6, as Bill's envy of Chuck's closeness to Abby grows, Malick uses point of view shots from Bill’s perspective that parallel Chuck’s. These subjective shots introduce Bill’s new feelings of jealousy, and prefigure the segment’s later POV shots in which Chuck will uncover the truth about Abby and Bill. Each character’s longing for Abby, and consequently Chuck’s discovery of Abby’s secret romance, occurs purely through subjective editing. Malick’s choice to visualize these emotions by getting behind a character’ eyes in a POV shot results in more than simply wordless storytelling. The motif provides the emotional perspective of each character from their physical perspective, balancing viewers’ alignment between Chuck and Bill. Viewers assemble the plot through the film’s formal cues. The use of editing encourages viewers to assemble the film’s meaning from their shared experience with the character's discoveries, rather than by narrating the plot’s events to viewers in plain words. The choice results in a deeper, more meaningful experience for the viewer than if Malick had conveyed these events through dialogue or narration – an experience that some viewers found lacking in Badlands.

Malick’s motif is consistent in the film’s depiction of Bill’s ambition to overcome his poverty. In addition to Bill's discontented dialogue with Abby in
segment 3, as well as Linda's narration, Malick inserts a powerful POV shot to communicate Bill's drive. In a sequence otherwise devoted to completing the harvest, Malick inserts a POV shot from Bill fixated on the farmer's house. By cutting together shots of farmhands finishing their autumn’s work with shots of Bill gazing at the house, Malick conveys Bill’s understanding that a window of opportunity is closing in which Abby could secure their financial future. Malick’s POV shots function like plot events, visualizing Chuck and Bill's alternating alienation from Abby and Bill's growing intent to scam Chuck. The events are of the kind that *Badlands* likely would have portrayed less effusively, through Holly’s voiceover narration, rather than from any character’s point of view. The intention in *Badlands* may have been to withhold the characters’ emotions in order for viewers to experience compassion by inferring their own reactions. However, by physically positioning the camera so that viewers can see through the characters’ eyes, the film creates no options other than its intended viewing experience.

The film assembles a profound sense of place from its disparate views of Chuck's farm just as the credit sequence evoked the atmosphere of Chicago through the credit sequence’s stills. Far from a classical approach, Malick does not consider sequences of nature’s plants and animals to be digressive in his narrative. In his consistent inclusion of shots devoted solely to beautiful compositions in the landscape, Malick strongly suggests to the viewer a solid link between the characters’ action and the natural action around them, occurring in tandem. Only by laying a natural foundation in the film’s universe from the farm’s earliest conception in segment 1 can
Malick later draw the plot’s concurrent crescendos between characters and nature. The seemingly fantastical notion, a plague of locusts and hellfire coinciding with the climax of the characters’ emotional turmoil, occurs in a fashion consistent with the plot’s presentation up to that point. Thereby, as a result of the film’s reworked narrative structure, Malick reveals a larger thematic argument that interrelates the characters’ and nature’s climaxes – a thematic emphasis not achieved in Badlands.

However, the film additionally relies on style to tie nature’s relative presence or absence to the film’s biblical themes. The apocalyptic theme requires onscreen visualization to establish its presence in the film’s universe and thus to enable its potentially fantastical emergence in the film’s climax. The theme utilizes a sophisticated approach to invoke concepts of heaven and hell on earth, particularly for the theme’s development of the opposition between farm and factory.

Malick’s use of film form to represent heaven and hell on earth is manifest in the film’s use of lighting and camera movement. Malick resisted using any artificial light, even in the interior locations within Chuck’s house, the farmhands’ quarters and the barn.16 His approach is evident in the large windows and open doorways that allow natural light to infiltrate. Furthermore, Malick shot as many scenes as possible during the so-called “magic hour.”17 The term refers to the twenty-minutes of light just before twilight, the narrowest time frame with which Malick’s crew possibly could work. As a result, Malick’s creation of his universe’s specific time is two-fold: setting his story both in the time period of 1916, and the constant time of day just before sunset.

---

17 Or as Almendros came to refer to it, “tragic hour.” (Ibid)
The lighting design’s combined effect is a heavenly glow that saturates the film’s presentation. The images that result appear as though, with each fade-in or cut, the viewer constantly enters and re-enters a dream. The exceptions in this presentation are also those scenes in which Malick creates visual opposition to the farm’s heavenliness and experiments with the notion, and visualization, of hellfire (segments 1, 2 and 7). The scenes lit in this fashion comprise Bill’s factory, the bonfire that celebrates the end of the harvest, and the climactic wheat fire. The only light that illuminates the scenes comes from actual fire: respectively, the factory’s burning coal, the bonfire and the burning wheat.

The opening scene establishes Bill as living in an industrial hell. Lit along with his co-workers only by the flames of the fire they feed with black coal, Bill’s overseer oppresses him and, in return, Bill commits a violent act of rage and. He escapes only by running towards natural daylight without looking back. The film depicts his escape in a shot saturated with blues and whites contrasting with the factory’s blacks and oranges. The film creates a purposeful opposition through the lighting design between Bill’s subsequent escape from the fiery blackness of Chicago to the spectrum of hues in pastoral Texas. The lighting design’s transition is paired with an aural transition, from stifled speechlessness to the power of Linda’s speech. The film presents the factory scene in the drowned-out tones of the machinery’s sound effects, and the clarity of Linda’s voiceover appears in a sound bridge over the cuts that transport her, Bill and Abby away from Chicago. The distinct lighting designs of the two spaces visually suggest the heavenly or hellish experience of each environment, one defined by nature
and the other by its lack thereof. Linda’s enunciation of the film’s story encourages viewers to engage with her narration as she lays out further characterization of Chicago and the film’s apocalyptic themes.

Segments 2 and 7 suggest that the heaven Malick creates at the farm is not without its hellishness. In the bonfire and wheat fire scenes, the characters around the light source are silhouettes cloaked in black that appear onscreen like a band of chaotic demons. In segment 2, the main characters’ are the only faces that Malick chooses to illuminate. Abby and Chuck are visible as she agrees to stay on with him after the harvest, thereby sealing the characters’ doomed fates. Bill looks on at Abby and Chuck with the burgeoning jealousy that later will cause their scheme’s undoing. The fourth visible face is that of the fiddler, who emits a wild and indiscernible song as though he is speaking in tongues. The last is that of Linda, the character most convinced of the devil’s presence, looking on at the devilish fiddler in fixed wonderment. The scene’s lighting design highlights the key information that relates to the characters’ plotlines and darkens the rest of the space, invoking a foreboding atmosphere that illustrates the plot event’s implications. The shots of Linda and the fiddler further connect the plot event to the apocalyptic theme that Linda’s character continually invokes.

Beyond the stylistic use of light to characterize a given space’s heavenliness or hellishness, the film’s overall use of light speaks to Malick’s larger cinematic goals. The incentive to shoot without artificial light in a low-light time of day, such as magic hour, displays a certain preference from the filmmaker for capturing a specific environment rather than illuminating characters’ faces. This impulse appeared similarly in Badlands.
through the use of the XLS motif. However in *Days of Heaven* – which devotes so much more time to the environment’s exposition – low-light shots of characters often appear in an extra-long shot scale. These shots make clear the film’s intention to submerge its characters’ plot in its larger depiction of a world, and to emphasize the thematic forces that the narrative and stylistic presentation reveals. If Malick loved the way a shot looked because of the sky's lighting, but as a result the actors’ faces showed no definition and appear only in silhouette, the shot suggests that individuals are not as important as the world as a whole.

Malick’s camera movement enhances the effects, both heavenly and hellish, created by his lighting design. *Days of Heaven* pioneered the Panaglide camera, Panavision’s early version of the now popular Steadicam or Glidecam. The mobility of the Panaglide enabled both rapid and fluid movement without the use of any kind of tracks. John Bailey aptly describes the resulting effect as having “a floating quality.” The camera’s increased capability is clear from repeated shots of the pond. A body of water, the space of the pond appears in opposition to the film’s hellfire. The pond is among the farm’s most heavenly spaces, the setting for private exchanges between Bill and Abby (segments 3 and 5). In the pond’s first appearance, viewers intimately glimpse one of the lovers’ fleeting romantic interactions as Malick melds biblical imagery with the characters’ romance. In a long shot, the film presents Bill washing Abby’s feet, picking her up and holding her, surrounding their rare intimate act in calm contrast to the raging hellfire. Without drawing too close a connection to walking

---

18 Almendros, 1984; p. 176
19 Bailey, 2007; interview.
on water in the bible, still the camera evokes the fluid quality of moving through water. The seamless movement of the camera with the characters’ staging more deeply connects the viewing experience with the characters than before was possible when the camera was locked to a tripod. The proximity of the camera and its ability to follow the characters’ movement creates the effect that the characters’ anguish and longing for one another motivates the camera’s movement and thus the viewer’s eye.

Just as it can create heavenly moments, the Panaglide enhances moments that are hellish. The constant movement of the camera while the locusts attack, and subsequently as the wheat burns, creates a visual chaos and a frenzied mood that reflects the characters’ internal state as they wander the space in shocked confusion (segment 6). The chaotic camera movement is particularly notable in the hellfire sequence. The camera movement that capture the sackers dousing the flames mimics the chaos that the camera movement evokes from the sackers’ trying to keep pace with the machinery alongside them in the fields in segments 2 and 3. Thus, through the camera movement’s pattern and the plot’s variation, the film draws a stylistic connection between industry outpacing humans and fire overpowering them. In addition to the Panaglide, Malick employs a crane to create effects that he first achieved with the extra long shot in Badlands (although a few shots in Badlands also evidence the use of a crane). His use of the crane stylistically supports Malick’s intention to immerse his story in its setting. An exemplary instance of that use appears in segment 1 in the sequence depicting the farmhands during their leisure time. The sequence begins with shots of farmhands relaxing, as well as a shot of Abby, Bill, and Linda playing tag.
Finally, the camera settles in a close shot on a pond full of farmhands swimming and enjoying themselves, and then gradually rises upward, pulling back to reveal the acres of farmland around it. In the distant background, Chuck’s stately house appears, far removed from the main action of the farmhands’ activities.

For Malick, the crane simultaneously achieves three cinematic ideals. The device enables the camera’s movement from a close shot, closely connecting viewers with a group of characters, to an extra long shot in which viewers see the characters’ place in the landscape’s larger tapestry. Furthermore, the crane enables Malick visually to detail the extent to which the workers from various cities east of Texas, and this pastoral slice of Americana’s owner, represent vastly disparate worlds united only by the event of the harvest – a natural force in the film’s story. In particular, the crane aids in the portrayal of the chasm that Bill’s character feels between his endemic poverty and Chuck’s comfortable lifestyle.

Thus, through patterns and variation in editing, light, and camera movement, the film renders words inessential to its narration of the story. By substituting cinematic devices for an excess of verbal storytelling, the film feels as though silent, at least in comparison with Badlands. However, to refer to Days of Heaven as a silent film would be to deprecate the function of Ennio Morricone’s highly effective score. The film employs musical motifs, among secondary stylistic tools that include occasional pictorial shots and a wide shot scale, to create narrative and character distinctions through cinematic devices rather than verbal narration. The XLS motif pioneered in Badlands does not appear with as much significance in Days of Heaven. In Badlands, the
motif was essential to uniting the locations across the American northwest, constantly changing as the characters fled, to create a cohesive sense of the badlands’ space. However, in Days of Heaven, the extra-long shot helps to make the extreme close-ups of the locusts appear with a heightened sense of significance and foreboding. For the most part, the film reserves close-ups for its leading characters, preferring the extra long shot to capture more generally a sense of life on the farm. Thus when the locusts appear in abundance, the tightly framed shots of the insects perched on blades of wheat emphasize them as pernicious and indestructible amidst the innumerable blades of wheat portrayed in extra-long shot’s scope (segment 7).

Malick’s stylistic immersion of the film’s characters within the larger environment of the farm helps to expand what would be a much smaller film in the hands of another filmmaker. The film’s epic scale results as much from Malick’s understanding of 35mm film stock, and the Panaglide camera, as it does from locusts and hellfire. The film employs a majestic use of style to convey its narrative’s underlying themes. The factory is not simply bleak – its lack of light, confrontational cuts to reaction shots, and active camera movement, convey the factory as near hellish. Similarly, the wheat fields are not merely pastoral – their glow in the magic hour’s sky, and floating presentation in an extra-long shot scale from the crane’s ascension, makes them appear heavenly. The film’s use of editing allows for relatively wordless narration, as well as the depiction of concomitant forces in nature that drive the narrative forward to its disastrous climax. Where the narrative leaves ambiguous gaps or creates fragile thematic connections, the film’s score functions to punctuate events.
Finally, the film typically transitions between segments with fades in and out – as with the natural pace of the closing or opening of a day. The film’s narrative and style encourage the viewer to draw connections between discrete shots and scenes that may have no connection in classical sense. However, assembling meaning from the film’s connective cues guides the viewer to appreciate the film’s central theme on the human capacity to upset the world’s natural balance.

Viewing Experience

As the narrative structure and style adjust to feature more prominently the film’s central theme, so too does the viewing experience change from Malick’s first feature to his second. As briefly noted in the introduction, a central function of Linda’s voiceover is to cue viewers to the ideal set of attitudes with which to watch the film. However, her voiceover evidences knowledge of events for which her character would not have been present. Thus Linda is not simply a witness, but appears as though she too is a viewer sitting in the next seat commenting on the action. Her voiceover does more than encourage viewers to adopt sympathetic attitudes toward the characters’ actions. She leads by example with a compassionate yet God-fearing position on the film’s overall presentation, cuing viewers to respond to the story as she does. Linda suggests her apocalyptic fears, but never categorizes the plague of locusts and hellfire as biblical events in her own words. Thus viewers make the connection between the theme suggested by her narration and subsequent events in the narrative.

This effect is consistent with the method by which Malick recorded Linda’s voiceover during production. Allegedly, Linda Manz watched the dailies and Malick recorded her descriptions of the narrative action from her own perspective. He recorded over sixty hours of her narration (Crittenden, Fisk, Norris & Weber, 2007; commentary).
that evoke the presence of God in a fashion that prefigures the encouragement of Malick’s later films.

The changed function of Linda’s voiceover from Holly’s is emblematic of the difference between the two films’ stories. The films differ not merely for the their narrative structures, but in their stories’ varied emphases on characters’ acts versus characters’ emotions. *Badlands* assumed a different approach to a story that could have been told in much the same way as *Days of Heaven*. For those with whom the film did not resonate, a common reason for the failed experience resulted from the film’s resistance to outpouring emotion, in accordance with Holly’s sense of propriety as the narrator. In contrast, *Days of Heaven* dwarfs the facts of its story not only by focusing on the nature that surrounds it but also by emphasizing the passion that drives the characters forward.

The film, in turn, does not favor any one character’s subjective experience or motivation (apart arguably from Linda’s). Rather, reflected in Linda’s voiceover, the film presents the experience of each character with a relatively even hand. *Days of Heaven’s* structure moves viewers from one character’s experience to the next, best exemplified by its liberal point of view editing pattern. The points of view among which the film oscillates cross narrative lines that a more conventional film might uphold to create antagonists or viewer/character alliances. The film’s movement across sympathetic subjectivities cues viewers to assume a mindset of emotional willingness, positioning viewers to empathize with each character’s experience as it becomes central to the plot. The film encourages viewers to be vulnerable – not to suffer or enjoy the
subjective experience of only one character, but the subjectivities of each character. Although viewers know from the outset that Bill and Abby are in a romantic relationship and why Abby marries Chuck, viewers are positioned to see Abby and Bill from afar through Chuck’s eyes as he witnesses the kiss that arouses his apocalyptic anger (segment 7). Continuously repositioning the audience to see the film from a different character’s point of view, the film encourages viewers to have sympathy for Bill, who has lost Abby to Chuck, to have sympathy for Chuck, whose wife has betrayed him, and to feel sympathy for Abby, who is doomed by the ties that connect her to each man.

Whereas *Badlands*’ plot moves forward more conventionally according to events, *Days of Heaven*’s plot moves forward through emotions, even deadly sins – love, lust, envy, greed, wrath, and so forth. *Days of Heaven* narrates its plot less verbally, asking viewers to participate more in the story’s construction. As the film constructs the plot largely through point of view editing, the film cues viewers to piece together the story from having seen the action through an individual character’s eyes at moments of heightened emotion. The viewing experience, for those whom the film’s cues can affect, is the complex and singular experience of entering Malick’s cinematic universe. The film cues the audience to connect its story and discern its themes to the effect of viewers’ awe of the natural world. But in doing so, the film encourages viewers’ emotional willingness to feel compassion for alternating characters’ experiences.
Chapter 3.

The Thin Red Line (1998)

Malick’s third feature is based on the James Jones novel of the same title. The film tells the story of the battle for Guadalcanal, a turning point in WWII for the US military. The narration unfolds from multiple points of view within one infantry Company, from the power-hungry First Lieutenant Colonel to the company’s most petrified private.\textsuperscript{21}

\textsuperscript{21} For a complete segmentation, see Appendix.
From Terrence Malick purists to commercial audiences, viewers often underestimate *The Thin Red Line*. For many, the nearly three-hour running length and the untraditional presentation of the combat genre, particularly in the philosophical tone of the film’s flashbacks and voiceover narration, are flaws in the film’s presentation. Ironically, Malick devotees decry the film’s dramatic cuts from Malick’s original version that allegedly ran over five hours. While the film was generally well received by critics – nominated for seven Oscars but winning none – the film was not a box office success. In North American box office sales, *The Thin Red Line* accrued only $36 million, well below its $52 million budget.\(^{22}\)

Nonetheless, *The Thin Red Line* is a stand out in Malick’s body of work for its unconcealed effort to bring to the surface Malick’s fixations as a filmmaker. *The Thin Red Line* singles out characters in its ensemble cast as agents of the film’s thematic questions on the relationship of humans, nature and God. In Private Witt, the film creates a character that prefigures *The New World’s* Pocahontas as someone who makes the connection among humans, nature and God as unified. His character’s cues are more difficult for the viewer to assemble because, although the film’s presentation overtly puts forward its underlying themes, the thematic argument maintains ambiguities that *The New World* clarifies. In order to draw connections, as well as call connections into question, among humans, nature, and God, the narrative and stylistic systems structure the film with a central focus on evoking its themes from its story, its characters, and its setting. Just as *Days of Heaven’s* story served Malick’s thematic

\(^{22}\)Gray; Box Office Mojo.
interests through its central focus on a world regulated by nature, The Thin Red Line’s story is ripe with comparisons between humanity and the natural world.

The film proposes three thematic arguments that guide Malick’s cinematic adaptation of James Jones’ novel. In segment 5, Private Witt looks at the wounded and dying soldiers around him and suggests in voiceover: “Maybe all men got one big soul who everybody’s a part of. All faces of the same man – one big self.” The theme proposes a unity among all humans, regardless of rank or race. The film reveals the theme through juxtapositions in its narrative structure, by equally distributing subjective devices across characters of disparate ranks, and by creating an unidentified voiceover that speaks for all of the characters. Secondly, the film opens with the voiceover narration, “What’s this war in the heart of nature?” The theme questions the link between human nature and the natural world. The theme appears in the film’s voiceover content and in the film’s pictorialism to discover if, as Days of Heaven suggested, violence is a mutation in mankind or if the violence the characters encounter in war can be seen occurring simultaneously in nature. Finally, the film wonders most subtly if God’s presence can be felt in the natural world. The third theme relies most heavily upon the viewer’s construction of the film’s cues, which appear similarly through pictorialism, voiceover content, and score motifs, as well as through characters such as Pvt. Witt and Sgt. McCron. The film redirects questions that fearful soldiers might ordinarily ask of God and poses them to nature, calling into question God’s presence in the jungle that surrounds them.
The Thin Red Line reformulates its narrative structure, combining elements from Malick’s prior films with new attributes specific to this film’s thematic goals. As with Malick’s prior films, causally driven plotlines comprise the overarching narrative structure, with those plot lines largely presented in an episodic fashion. The Thin Red Line’s narrative is distinct from its predecessors in its threefold method of narration, from an abstracted unidentified voiceover to the voiceovers spoken by specific characters. The narrative structure unifies many disparate characters in order to illustrate the thematic notion of “one big self.” The film’s episodes within each narrative segment cull certain soldiers’ subjectivities from among the many soldiers in combat, tying each man’s experience inextricably to the collective experience of the whole company. Episodes further present the film’s unprecedented use of flashback sequences.

Apart from voiceover narration, pictorialism is the primary tool the film employs to illustrate its underlying themes. Pictorialism’s amplified presence from prior films corresponds to the themes’ prominence from which pictorial shots derive meaning. In addition, secondary stylistic tools such as subjective and objective sound, discontinuous editing, and hand-held camera movement, function to illustrate the soldiers’ subjective experiences in battle. The Thin Red Line’s stylistic presentation, particularly from its secondary devices, seeks to engage viewers in the film through a firsthand experience as a soldier in combat. The film’s recreates for viewers the experience that motivates its characters to ask the film’s thematic questions, in order to encourage viewers to assemble the film’s thematic cues. The use of style creates a
subjective point of view that unifies the film’s collection of subjectivities through the experience of the viewer watching it.

Theme

Themes appear with a larger, more identifiable role in The Thin Red Line than their suggestion in Days of Heaven and even more subtle presence in Badlands. In every narrative segment, characters make use of their natural setting or are put in danger by it. The plot’s setting leads seamlessly into the questions posed by the characters in voiceover, in which the film’s themes most prominently come forth. Again, The Thin Red Line presents three underlying themes in its story, relating the complexities connecting humans, nature and God. The Thin Red Line endows C-Company with a shared and constant curiosity about mankind and the world: the source of humanity’s goods and evils, the true nature of nature itself. The divisive plot revolves around a war, but the film illustrates the theme of one big soul that unifies all humans, both within C-Company and between the Americans and Japanese. The film reveals the collective soul theme with the most frequency, as the theme makes the greatest impact on the film’s narrative structure and the film’s modes of narration.

Although inconclusive, the film suggests another theme: that humans could reflect nature, in that nature may also evidence the cruelty that drives humans to war. The Thin Red Line is Malick’s first film in which his characters have a conflicted attitude toward the nature that surrounds them. In Days of Heaven, no character took nature for granted – it provided the livelihood of every character in the film, and a welcomed change from the lack of nature that Bill, Abby and Linda suffered in Chicago.
Nonetheless, the film presented the natural world as capable of great beauty in addition to great harm. While Linda adored her new home in the wheat fields of Texas, a storm of locusts brought Chuck’s ruin. The distinction in *The Thin Red Line*’s treatment of this theme appears in its characters’ shared awareness of and ambivalence toward nature’s dual powers, aided by the film’s foreign location. Unlike *Days of Heaven*, *The Thin Red Line* emphasizes an otherness of nature that the characters located in Texas do not encounter in the same way. From the moment the film opens, *The Thin Red Line* presents plants and animals as a mystery, both dangerous and divine, never conclusively identifying nature’s character. More ambiguously than the first two themes, the natural world evinces more than simply nature, suggesting that nature might have beyond human qualities.

The film’s natural world evinces wonders that imply the presence of God. This theme appears in the opening narration, “*Is there an avenging power in nature? Not one power but two?*” (segment 1). Nature takes on the significance of a higher power from the questions posed to the natural world from characters that confront new wartime traumas every day. Given the characters’ perilous circumstances, their voiceovers’ arguments and questions might seem more plausible, or at least typical, if posed to God. However, the traumas the soldiers experience and commit, compounded by their immersion in an unknown setting, believably invite their curiosity about nature’s powers in place of God’s.

The film encourages the viewer to look for God in nature more explicitly than it presents the characters doing so. The film poses questions about nature in voiceover
over majestic shots of the natural world that are not indicated as any particular character’s point of view. The film’s presentation alternately evokes the characters’ awe, fear, and admiration, yet also presents its God theme for the viewers’ experience of the natural world. For instance, in the combination of the film’s final voiceover narration and imagery, the voiceover is oblique, unspecific in its meaning and its intended audience. The film therefore asks the viewer to decipher its message while looking at shots of nature, as though challenging viewers to “feel the glory,” (segment 13).

The final narration in The Thin Red Line notably foreshadows The New World’s variation on Malick’s films’ recurring themes. Over a shot of a canoe on a stream, fading into the jungle in the background, the closing lines of voiceover speak, “Oh, my soul, let me be in you now. Look out through my eyes, look out at the things you made. All things shining,” (segment 13). The reference to souls cues the film’s theme relating to humans, appears over imagery of nature, and refers to an act of creation that suggests a combined relationship of human and nature to God. The film does not explicitly present its voiceover as making the connection among these three characters. Instead, the film plants cues for each thematic category and encourages the viewer to compose the connection from what they hear and see onscreen. The theme is not easily accessible – the least suggestively articulated of the three, assembling the theme requires active participation and keen awareness of the film’s cues. But the voiceover indicates an evolved sense of conviction over the course of the film, from where it began with, “Is there an avenging power in nature?” The final suggestion of God’s presence prefigures the
theme that *The New World* will construct more accessibly, but does not suggest that *The New World*'s variation on the theme has been present throughout the film.

The connection between God and nature is a theme that the film encourages the viewer to construct, and suggests onscreen in the minor character of Sgt. McCron. The film suggests Sgt. McCron, who loses all twelve of his men in the first battle, is a character who begins to create the connection between God and nature as he descends into insanity (segment 4). He first appears in segment 3, leading a recitation of the Lord’s Prayer with his men on their boat as they approach the beach. His first appearance colors his character with a literal religiosity that infrequently appears in the film. When he starts to go insane after losing his men in the following segment, his character becomes a voice for the injustices in the war’s deaths. His initial appearance as a religious character suggests that his subsequent rants are the film’s equivalents of sermons, without the film reintroducing any overt religiosity in which the bible might distract from nature’s godly power. McCron’s sermons are directed outward to no character in particular but the landscape. In segment 5b, McCron appears sermonizing to the void on God’s absence: “Who’s deciding who’s gonna live? Who’s deciding who’s gonna die? *This is futile!*” McCron’s speech addresses a larger plan, alluding to God without articulating a connection between nature and a deity. However, the speech begins over a pictorial shot of coyotes eating corpses, drawing a close connection between nature’s cruelty and McCron’s religious characterization.

*The Thin Red Line*’s thematic variations on Malick’s fixation with the relationship among humans, nature and God, come forward with varying levels of
ambiguity. The themes on the collective soul and nature’s true character come forth most clearly from the film’s construction. Unlike *Days of Heaven*’s biblical plot events, the theme on God’s presence or absence in nature comes forth most subtly, as no character speaks explicitly to or about deity. The viewer is responsible for solidifying nature’s connection to God from the film’s cues, which make only subtle references over imagery of the natural world. The film’s narration is an essential technique to the illustration of underlying themes.

**Narration**

*The Thin Red Line*’s narration appears in three distinct modes. The film puts forth its most conceptual, ambiguous thematic arguments in ongoing unidentified voiceover narration, which speaks the film’s opening and closing narration. Themes appear from characters’ points of view in soldiers’ flashback sequences and voiceovers, constituting the film’s subjective mode of narration. The third mode of the film’s narration occurs without the use of any voiceover and outside of any specific character’s head (in voiceover or flashback). The third mode includes the main events of the plot, mainly comprising the action that compels characters to reflect on the film’s themes, but occasionally presents themes through onscreen events and character interactions. Unlike Holly’s role as a narrator in *Badlands*, and Linda’s role as a commentator in *Days of Heaven*, *The Thin Red Line*’s voiceovers, unidentified and identifiable alike, function to express characters’ inner thoughts, shared only with the viewer. Whether in unidentified voiceover speaking on behalf of all characters, or in subjective voiceover speaking on behalf of only one character, once again Malick uses
voiceover to unite the film’s presentation under broader themes. The film typically makes use of all three modes of narration in its presentation of each narrative segment.

*The Thin Red Line* features an unidentified voiceover ruminating on the film’s themes in an ongoing struggle to make sense of the film’s story and world. The voiceover, characterized only by the widely shared traits of his early 20s timbre and southern accent, actually belongs to the minor character of Pvt. Train. He appears only twice in the film, once at the beginning of segment 2c and once in the middle of segment 13. However, his voiceover occurs before any character onscreen to whom it is attributable. Even when Train’s character appears, the film limits his appearance to an insufficient onscreen duration for viewers to discover him as the anonymous speaker. His character is never called by name, and speaks it only once. His indiscernible voiceover represents all of the characters’ inner feelings, anonymously proposing a line of shared thoughts that unify the company, as well as taking up themes of unity in the narrated content.

While the voiceover’s anonymity cues its representation of the whole company, the actual identity behind the voiceover is also significant to the collective soul theme. Of all of the soldiers who might narrate the film, Pvt. Train is a thematically strategic choice. In choosing Pvt. Train, Malick identifies even the most minor voice as one that can stand archetypically for the common thoughts that represent every character’s experience. The film presents Pvt. Train as thoroughly terrified, the least experienced, perhaps even the baby of the company. His first line of dialogue in the film is, “I just can’t help how damn scared I am, Sarge...we’re probably gonna die on the beach,”
(segment 2c). In a conversation leaving the island, the last lines of dialogue before the film concludes with his voiceover, Pvt. Train presents a revised set of worldviews from his initial speech. At first characterized by his complete inability to withstand his fear of the war, Pvt. Train concludes the film with the statement, “I been through the thick and thin of it, lived plenty of life...I’m getting older now, by no means old, but older,” (segment 13). Whereas his character’s first appearance distinguishes his experience from the range of other experiences in the soldiers’ barracks, any character in the film could speak his last line of dialogue as truly. Thus while his character’s anonymity functions to speak on behalf of the whole company, his onscreen experience provides an emblem of shared character development over the course of the film. Even without a viewer discerning the voiceover’s identity, the character behind the voice makes his own contribution to the collective soul theme.

The unidentified narration’s content takes up the film’s thematic preoccupations as a means of reconciling the chaos in the characters’ world. The voice articulates themes ambiguously, and resists drawing a connection among its spoken thoughts, the events of the action, and the intended listener. The trend begins with the abstract narration over the first sequence, and continues to reappear over the course of the film. Segment 8 displays the soldiers in the company committing some of their cruelest actions, including Pvt. Dale’s stealing gold teeth from Japanese corpses. Over a sequence of the company pillaging the Japanese camps and arresting POWs, the unidentified narration asks:

“This great evil - where’s it come from? How’d it steal into the world? What seed, what root did it grow from? Who’s doin’ this? Who’s killin’ us? Robbin’ us of life and light.
Mockin' us with the sight of what we might've known. Does our ruin benefit the earth? Does it help the grass to grow, the sun to shine?"

The narration, intended to represent a whole body of characters, conceives of the soldiers’ inhumane behavior in terms of its relationship to nature. The voiceover frames their cruelty in terms of its possible inheritance from nature’s evils as well as its possible contribution to nature’s best qualities. However, through the voiceover’s personified questions, the film draws a connection between nature’s power and a higher power. The narrator therefore grapples not only with the good and evil of nature, but the presence or absence of God in the natural world.

To further reveal the collective soul theme, the film distributes voiceover narration across a wide range of characters. The characters’ voiceovers express themes through their points of view, as well as form the theme structurally through subjectivity’s equal distribution. The theme provocatively comes forth when even a character from outside of C-Company speaks in voiceover, a dead one no less. A half-buried face of a dead Japanese soldier speaks to Pvt. Witt in voiceover in segment 7. Apart from its English translation, the film gives no stylistic or narrative indication that Witt invents the voiceover. In a long take of the dead Japanese soldier’s face, the voiceover says,

“Are you righteous? Kind? Does your confidence lie in this? Are you loved by all? Know that I was, too. Do you imagine your sufferings will be less because you loved goodness? Truth?”

The content of his narration unites the two characters, just as the allotment of the device unites the dead soldier with the characters across enemy lines.

Voiceover narration’s wide deployment across characters suggests the theme of human equality in addition to the theme’s appearance in the voiceovers’ content. Each
of Witt, Bell, Welsh, Staros, and Tall speak in voiceover narration, as do secondary characters such as Doll, Dale and Fife. Each character’s projected argument about a collective identity and shared soul is specific to that character’s plotline. Pvt. Bell’s character puts forth a compact form of the film’s thematic argument, as his voiceover constantly unifies his life with his wife’s: “We, we together, one being. Flow together like water till I can’t tell you from me,” (segment 5bi). Capt. Staros’ character embodies the thematic argument, compositing the lives of his men in his own soul. After Lt. Col. Tall forces him to return to Washington, Staros’ farewell to his men in dialogue transitions to a farewell in his voiceover, in which the theme infuses his parting words: “My dear sons. You live inside me now. I’ll carry you wherever I go,” (segment 9). When Pvt. Dale steals dead Japanese soldier’s gold teeth in front of one of their living comrades, Dale responds to the soldier’s curses in voice over, “What are you to me? Nothing,” (segment 8). However, a subsequent scene features Dale crying in the rain with a brief flashback to the soldier who cursed him. At the moment of his voiceover, Dale’s character protects himself by believing the two characters share nothing. In the scene that reflects upon it, Dale mourns the soldiers he vandalized, realizing the unity among them.

Sgt. Welsh and Pvt. Witt’s disagreement brings the collective soul theme to the film’s forefront through their interactions, inserting the theme into the third mode of narration – the main action of the plot. In segment 2a, the two central characters introduce their dispute over the role of the individual. While the characters disagree with one another, both sides of their ongoing argument find agreement with the film’s
overall stance on human unity. Sgt. Welsh’s argument is a variation on the film’s overall theme: “What difference do you think you can make, one single man in all this madness?” (segment 5b). Welsh takes as a given that “one single man” is an insignificant agent of humanity’s united potential. Even Welsh’s most adversarial stance to the theme ultimately fails to contradict the film’s overall argument. In his final voiceover, as soon as he says, “Only thing a man can do...make an island for himself,” he soon recognizes the insufficiency of such an attitude. He immediately follows with, “should I never meet you in this life, let me feel the lack,” (segment 13). War’s constant danger and waste harden his character. But even by the end of the film, Welsh is not so hard that he believes a life of isolation from his fellow men is a sufficient way to live.

Pvt. Witt’s stance conflicts with Welsh’s stance, but is more closely aligned with the film’s thematic argument on the collective soul. In segment 2a, while the two are incarcerated for going AWOL, Witt says to Pvt. Hoke, “I love Charlie Company. They’re my people.” Witt’s brave loyalty justifies his ultimate self-sacrifice for the company in the plot, which presents the event of his death as saving other men’s lives. In line with the thematic interpretation of “they’re my people,” the film suggests Witt’s death is a sacrifice of his soul to the greater soul of mankind, of which he will always be a part. As soon as Witt dies, the film cuts to a pseudo-flashback sequence in the Utopian Village for which he always longed. The sequence features shots that appeared in the first segment and in subsequent segments as flashbacks, only this time without Witt’s visual presence. The flashback suggests the collective soul theme when
Witt’s formal and thematic subjectivity remain in the film as though his soul remains a part of the company’s united soul even after his death.

The film subtly suggests that Pvt. Witt, like Sgt. McCron, makes connections among humans, nature and God, beyond those made by other characters in this or prior Malick films. When a voiceover appears from a dead Japanese soldier as aforementioned, Witt’s character is sufficiently finely attuned to spirituality to hear him. Witt first appears in the film’s alternative world to Guadalcanal, the Utopian island on which the film opens in segment 1. His character’s exposure to the harmony between humans and nature is designed as the narrative justification for his character’s calm and strength over the course of the film: his ability to soothe men before they die in battle as with Sgt. Keck (segment 4), and his brave self-sacrifice to divert the Japanese from his own company (segment 12). Welsh accuses Witt of “still believin’ in a beautiful light,” (segment 11) but the film implies that Witt’s exposure to a unified world and its harmonious way of life brings him closer to God. The film suggests that Witt bears a unique insight on the world’s workings. However, Malick disperses thematic cues throughout the film. The film makes it difficult for viewers to appreciate Witt’s understanding of those themes, compared to Pocahontas’ character in The New World, as his introduction likely precedes the viewer’s understanding of the film’s thematic arguments.

In an unprecedented fashion, The Thin Red Line creates three modes of narration that convey the film’s themes, with particularly effective portrayal of a collective soul that unifies mankind. From the single voiceover that appears in each of
Badlands and Days of Heaven, The Thin Red Line produces many. The unidentified voiceover deals most overtly with the film’s themes, in its narration’s content as well as in its representation of the whole company through one speaker’s voice. Like Linda’s voiceover in Days of Heaven, the anonymous voiceover’s cues encourage viewers to connect events in the film’s story to questions about God’s presence. In the film’s subjective mode of narration, each soldier characteristically grapples with the film’s themes as they become relevant to his plotline. Witt and Welsh in particular take on the film’s collective soul theme in their interactive dialogue. The complexity of the film’s underlying themes corresponds to the complex structure that the film employs for the narration of its story.

Narrative Structure

The Thin Red Line’s narrative distinctions surface from amidst general similarities to Malick’s previous work. As with his prior films, the story focuses on an American legend and the presentation of two alternative worlds. The plotlines that comprise the overarching narrative structure are causally driven. And in spite of being almost twice as long in running time, the film’s narrative divides among approximately the same number of segments as his prior films. The Thin Red Line’s 170-minute length is attributable to the narrative’s expansion of events that do not advance the plot. The film employs voiceover narration extensively, but also includes the essential development of flashback structures. In an episodic fashion, the film uses its subsegments to examine the film’s thematic objectives apart from its plot. Through the narrative structure, the film suggests the distilling of many experiences into one
cohesive experience, and analyzes the relationship among the soldiers, the flora and fauna that bear constant witness to their traumas, and to God.

*The Thin Red Line*, adapted from James Jones’ novel, presents a story with all of the attributes one would expect from a Malick film. The film employs the generic structure of the combat film, focusing its action on one company in the legendary battle for Guadalcanal. Unlike the rest of Malick’s work, *The Thin Red Line* is not set in the US, but among Americans in the Southwest Pacific. The setting’s foreign location lends itself to the film’s thematic wonderment over the true essence of the natural world. Furthermore, through Pvt. Witt’s plotline, the film presents the events in Guadalcanal in contrast to an alternative way of life. On an unnamed Utopian island in the South Pacific, the film opens in a world defined by its natural harmony (segment 1). In a structural compromise between the narratives of *Badlands* and *Days of Heaven*, the film’s full first segment takes place on the Utopian island, before transitioning to Guadalcanal for the remainder of the narrative.

The film’s opening segment provides an emblematic structure for narrative segments over the course of the film and demonstrates how the three modes of narration function. A relatively simple segment in terms of its plot events is complicated by its movement among modes of narration, by each mode’s relationship to the advancing plot, and by ambiguity. The first segment’s plot consists of two AWOL privates, Witt and Hoke, living in a utopian South Pacific village, in harmony with the villagers and with nature, until company that they deserted finds them. The segment opens on an abstraction: a sequence in a nonspecific jungle location,
presenting five shots of the natural world before cutting to the privates’ hideaway.

Furthering the abstraction, the sequence introduces the anonymous narrator, who immediately presents the film’s themes:

“What’s this war in the heart of nature? Why does nature vie with itself? The land contend with the sea? Is there an avenging power in nature? Not one power but two?”

The voiceover does not locate the film in any time or space other than nature’s, nor does it introduce any plot-related exposition. Instead, the film opens with the thematic questions to which the narrative will proceed in search of answers.

The abstract sequence in nature cuts to the village’s relatively concrete location in space (in its exposition if not on a map) and from an anonymous voice to a voice tied to character dialogue. But as soon as the film discloses the situation to viewers more specifically, it obscures time and space in a flashback sequence that presents Witt’s memories (segment 1a). His dialogue about immortality and his mother’s death extends over the images that precede the flashback, identifying the flashback as his own through the lines, “I just hope I can meet it the same way she did. With the same...calm. ‘Cause that’s where it’s hidden, the immortality I hadn’t seen.” However, Witt is not recognizable as any of the characters featured in the flashback sequence. Although his voiceover’s cues connect the flashback to his character, the main character featured in the flashback sequence is a little girl, among other shots dedicated to a birdcage, and the bedroom ceiling made only of sky.

The flashback sequence shares attributes with the film’s later flashbacks. The sequence portrays Witt’s private memories, the meaning of which remains undefined for the viewer. The film employs this ambiguous method to enhance the subjectivity of
its presentation, attempting to imitate the true semblance of remembered thoughts as meaningful only to the person who creates them. The flashback takes a similar form as the abstraction with which the segment started. Where the opening sequence featured a shot of a crocodile or an intricate tree in conjunction with a voiceover that asks, “Is there an avenging power in nature,” the flashback similarly makes ambiguous the relationship between voiceover and image.

The key distinction between the two sequences is that the former presents questions shared by many soldiers in the present, while the flashback sequence presents the memories of only one soldier that affect his understanding of the world as he now sees it. Abstract sequences, those narrated by the unidentified voiceover’s vague questions and thoughts, appear over shots of nature; flashbacks appear over locations familiar only to the character to whom the sequences are tied and with characters outside of C-Company. Witt’s flashback in the first segment establishes the thematic involvement of characters’ pasts in their current states, a trait that will come to unify his experience with another soldier, as flashbacks appear tied to Pvt. Bell.

Furthermore, the flashback primes the viewer’s mindset to make connections between voiceover and image that the film encourages but does not make outright – an essential viewing approach to assembling the connection between nature and God. The film finally reconnects the flashback to the present action by dissolving to Witt on a beach, further clarifying his character’s ownership of the memories presented.

The film’s opening segment cues viewers to expect an unconventional story from the generic combat film The Thin Red Line appears to be on its surface. The first
segment’s plot is relatively simple, but presented in episodic fashion that enriches the segment’s narration with the film’s overarching themes. The first segment defines the film’s overarching methods of narration, its definition of spectacle as occurring in nature in abstract sequences, an important character in Pvt. Witt, and the existence of a village in which humans and nature reflect each other’s harmony. The segment’s sequences move without warning from narrative abstraction to subjective flashback, outside of an apparent cause and effect relationship, each mode of narration with its own connection to the plot and to ambiguity. The narrative structure’s accommodation of multiple character subjectivities intensifies a familiar effect accomplished through point of view editing in Days of Heaven. But not until The Thin Red Line does Malick’s narrative construction combine narrative episodes, multiple subjectivities, and a spectrum of narration. Although only in its last scene does an event occur that moves the plot forward, the first segment clearly conveys the privates’ joyful time spent in the village and their consequent dread at the sight of an American ship. The film structures the narrative with greater complexity according to the complex underlying themes that each layer of narration functions to reveal.

Furthermore, where a classical approach might offer narrative exposition in its opening segment, The Thin Red Line’s exposition focuses upon the viewers’ introduction to its themes. The Thin Red Line signals its unique approach to the combat genre when the opening segment features no trace of war, notwithstanding the tattered army fatigues and dog tags still draped on the AWOL soldiers. Saving Private Ryan, a more faithful presentation of the combat genre released in the same year as The Thin Red
*Line,* presents its first segment amidst the heat of D-Day on the beach at Normandy. Where Stephen Spielberg chose to immerse his viewers in the spectacle of violence and artillery, Malick chooses spectacular beauties in nature: children swimming gleefully underwater, a view from the beach, a thousand roots growing into one single tree. For those viewers who might be unfamiliar with Malick’s style after his twenty year hiatus from filmmaking, the opening segment cues viewers’ expectations for an alternative form of spectacle from the traditional explosions of the battlefield.

The narrative constructs its second segment, in which the film introduces many of its main characters, in a fashion that suggests the thematic concept of unifying men’s experiences into the experience of “one big soul,” (segment 3). The segment transitions among sub-segments below deck with the incarcerated ex-AWOL soldiers, to above deck with the highest-ranking officers on the ship, to the barracks with the infantrymen who comprise C-Company. The disparate characters presented are not united in their characterization or plot contribution. Lt. Tall’s interaction on deck with Brig. Gen. Quintard (segment 2b) bears no similarity in its content with the interaction shared between Pvt. Mazzi and Pvt. Tills (segment 2c). Instead, the segment links the characters structurally by joining their sub-segments into one larger segment. Two characters, Pvt. Witt and Pvt. Bell, in separate sub-segments (segments 2a and 2c respectively) appear structurally linked through the flashback sequences attached to them (segments 2ai and 2ci). Pvt. Bell and Lt. Col. Tall are linked through their common use of voiceover narration (segments 2b and 2c). Furthermore, in each sub-segment and the multiple scenes that comprise sub-segment 2c, characters converse in
two-shots, creating stylistic commonalities between the interactions as well as in the
narration through dialogue. The film transports viewers from the action of one
military rank to the next, providing one character’s subjective access in each rank.
Through flashback or voiceover, the character’s subjectivity functions as an expression
of his specific experience, while simultaneously evoking the common links among men
of all ranks from the device’s repeated appearance in another sub-segment. The
constant movement from one line of action to the next, and between two modes of
narration, forms the company’s composite identity from all of the characters that
appear in it.

Therefore, while the first segment primes viewers for the film’s modes of
narration, the second segment primes viewers for the narrative shifts that unify
characters in disparate ranks. Each consecutive segment mimics the patterns
established in the first and second segment in service of the film’s themes. Segment 4
is the climactic segment in the themes’ presentation as well as the film’s plot. By far
the longest in the film, the segment intensifies the narrative structure’s composite effect
by bringing the entire company to one unified location – a location in which the
narrative action creates shared life or death circumstances for every character at every
moment. As the segment shifts focus from one group of characters to the next, the
common experience of being under siege unites what otherwise would be the unique
experience of each group into the mutual experience of escalated stakes.

Unlike segment 2, segment 4 assembles sub-segments into one comprehensive
segment, just as the battlefield unites soldiers from rank’s prior divisions of the ship’s
space. The segment proceeds from Pvt. Doll’s first killing experience to Sgt. Keck’s rookie mistake of killing himself accidentally with his own grenade. The segment similarly connects its raw and gruesome presentation of Sgt. Welsh’s attempt to save Pvt. Tella with Lt. Col. Tall’s cruel order for a frontal attack. The presentation of Tall, consistently communicating by radio at a distance from enemy fire, isolates the segment’s one formal character distinction. As the character displaying the least humanity, Tall is consistently presented in a disjointed space familiar from the levels above and below deck on the ship. His character’s interactions with Capt. Staros are united with the segment’s overall presentation rather than appearing in their own sub-segment as in segment 2b. However, the film evokes its collective soul theme by presenting his character at a distance from the self-sacrifice and love that men share on the battlefield, a character that embodies the human evil that festers in the story’s war. Thus, in the heat of battle, segment 4 breaks down the structural barriers presented in segment 2, just as the film puts forth a comprehensive experience of the battle from the many subjective experiences the characters present. The segment is designed according to the film’s overarching argument that every man’s life is a part of one all-encompassing soul, including Lt. Col. Tall in the structure but presenting him at a distance onscreen.

The soldiers’ curiosity about nature extends from their constant interaction with nature in the film’s plot. The natural world plays an integral part in their battle. Nature shields them from the enemy, as the grass hides Pvt. Bell when he scouts the Japanese Bunker (segment 5a). But as often, nature shields the enemy from the
soldiers, as the same grass leads to the privates’ swift death during 2nd Lt. Whyte’s scout mission (segment 4). As described below, at times nature is the enemy in battle, presenting a threat as dangerous as any Japanese bullet. Given the location of the plot’s battle in the jungle, the nature theme is a simpler one to visualize on screen than the soul theme, which the film reveals mainly through strategic narrative structure and in spoken narration. Segment 4 similarly exemplifies the film’s method for revealing its nature theme and the different possible attributes of its power.

Malick inserts three events into segment 4, in the portrayal of the film’s largest battle scene, that evidence his intent to keep nature among the film’s foremost concerns. These events are particularly salient in the segment for their appearance at moments when the high stakes of the plot might otherwise overshadow nature. As the battle erupts, the film cuts from combat violence to a shot of Pvt. Coombs recoiling from a snake in the grass. At that moment, the snake poses a more proximate danger to him even than enemy fire. The shot suggests that there is not one clear enemy for the company, but hidden enemies in the natural elements all around them. When Lt. Col. Tall screams, “Come to life over there, Staros!” and a canon erupts, the film follows the command by cutting to a shot of a baby bird being born. The shot functions as a counterpoint to the war surrounding it in the scene, juxtaposing nature’s gentleness to the horrors in the characters’ plot. The baby bird contrasts the snake that precedes it, balancing nature as the source of both death and life, reflecting the most menacing and purest actions in mankind. Finally, just after segment 4’s eruptions as Bell’s party sneaks up the mountain to assess the enemy’s bunker, a bird flies out of
nowhere into Dale’s face, scaring him and causing him to react as if it had been a bullet (segment 5a). The event is a digressive surprise from the high-tension plotline of Bell’s party up the hill, presenting nature as engaged in its own system of events unrelated to the war that humans wage against each other. The episodic moments between plot events inconclusively contrast human nature to the natural world, but present humans as a decidedly alienated form nature. If humans are a part of the larger natural tapestry, segment 4’s events suggest that mankind is nature’s cruelest thread.

Whereas the film suggests its God theme primarily through its anonymous voiceover’s narration, The Thin Red Line’s other themes surface in the narrative’s construction of its segments, equating its disparate characters, and nature as a constant witness to, even participant in, the film’s narrative events. Segments 2 and 4 exemplify the film’s method of forming the composite identity of mankind, through their use of the film’s three levels of narration, as well as through structural parallels in the narrative’s sub-segments to unite characters of disparate rank. Segments 4 and 5 similarly evidence the film’s analysis of nature’s identity, appearing intermittently in the characters’ plotlines as a form of protection as well as a threat. Finally, the aforementioned Sgt. McCron’s rants punctuate intermittent moments of calm in the plot’s combat, presenting a character who reacts to the futility in the world around him by looking for sense in a larger plan. In segment 4, his staging combines his character’s connection to God with nature, as he pulls up handfuls of grass, dropping them in mid-air with the words, “That’s all there is for us, that’s us, that’s us.” The connection between nature and God that The Thin Red Line reveals prefigures The New World’s
themes: the unity of God, nature and humans, the certainty that God is in nature, and the practice of speaking to God through voiceover narration.

Martin Scorsese, who ranked the film in his personal top two of the 1990s, said of *The Thin Red Line*,

“As you watch it, you wonder, ‘what is narrative? Is it everything? And if so, is there only one way to handle it?’...If Malick had just a straightforward narrative, he could never have achieved the kind of poetry he does here, or made a film where you really come to see the world as a primeval place... this film is so important. You can come in the middle of it and just watch it. It’s almost like an endless picture, it has no beginning and no end. People say, ‘Well, sometimes I can’t tell whose voiceover it is.’ It doesn’t matter. It’s everybody’s voiceover.”

Scorsese’s response to the film speaks directly to *The Thin Red Line*’s singular approach to narrative causality, allowing themes to dictate the narrative structure in what Scorsese identifies as the presentation of a “primeval” world. The film makes distinctive decisions, even compared to Malick’s prior films, in the way that its narration presents the story in three discrete modes. The narrative’s presentation of its plot is further distinctive: the fact that the characters win the battle for Guadalcanal is hardly the film’s focus. Malick’s approach to *The Thin Red Line*’s narrative seeks to achieve profound thematic meaning outside of a conventional plot structure that employs the film’s plot as method of bringing those themes to light.

**Style**

*The Thin Red Line*’s style illustrates underlying themes primarily through the use of a specific and a guiding stylistic principle. In conjunction with the device of voiceover narration, pictorial shots punctuate the narrative action with thematically

---

23 Scorsese; Ebert & Roeper.
derived meaning. The shots function to create images that embody the questions at the heart of the film: if the evil that drives humans to war can be found in nature, and what that means if God is present in the natural world. The guiding stylistic principle seeks to simulate the viewer’s first-hand experience of battle amidst other subjective combat experiences that the film’s style portrays. Thus in addition to pictorialism, the film employs secondary stylistic tools – discontinuous editing, subjective and objective sound, and hand-held camera movement – to illustrate the war subjectively as though the viewer has a soldier’s point of view. For this reason, the film allows style to alter the presentation of its world more so than Malick’s previous films. The visceral and intimate stylistic presentation of war’s danger makes the film’s overriding existential themes all the more effective.

Although featured in voiceover narration, the film’s underlying themes regarding nature are most effectively conveyed through their onscreen depiction. The film’s carefully composed pictorial shots of nature illustrate its mystery, its majesty, and its ambiguous power. However, pictorial shots derive their thematic potential from nature’s role in the composition of important plot events. Nature’s paradoxes, the inherent danger and intrigue in its beauty, appear in the composition of the film’s battle sequences. During the battle for the Japanese bunker, the two warring companies are divided by a hill of tall obstructive grass. In the anticipation of combat, several shots appear for the sole purpose of conveying the lack of visibility through the grass. In these compositions, grass assumes the danger of the Japanese soldiers that could be lurking behind it. The danger is made particularly real in segment 4 during
2nd Lt. Whyte’s scout mission, in which two privates die from bullets that emerge through the sea of grass in front of them. In segment 8, before the battle for the Japanese camp at the top of the hill, Malick uses mist in a similar way. The mist is so thick that it hides the appearance of the Japanese soldiers waiting on the other side of it, assuming the danger of the enemy within the shots’ compositions. Nature’s role within shots such as these establishes the plot significance that pictorial shots of nature can then imbue with thematic meaning in isolation.

Pictorial shots intermittently punctuate the narrative and lend thematic meaning to the events of the plot. The film’s opening sequence exemplifies Malick’s typical use of the device. Five pictorial shots each represent an occurrence in which nature shows an organic conflict. The sequence designs each shot’s composition to mimic the voiceover narration, “What’s this war in the heart of nature? Why does nature vie with itself, the land contend with the sea?” The opening shot features a crocodile sinisterly submerging itself into water covered with an opaque green moss. The third shot, in which voiceover first appears, presents sunlight trying to crack through the jungle’s dark canopy of leaves. Lt. Col. Tall later makes direct reference to the fourth shot when he proclaims, “Nature’s cruel, Staros,” (segment 9). The fourth shot depicts the “vines, the way they twine around the trees” by tilting the camera up a skinny tree trunk around which a thick brown vine spirals. The final shot in the abstract sequence before cutting to the utopian village features hundreds of roots reaching up a large tree in order to get enough nutrients. Each of these shots conveys information about the film’s theme without building on the shot that comes before or after it. Four of the
five shots are presented from a low camera angle that enhances the presentation of nature as menacing, powerful and even almighty. The meaning in each shot expounds upon the role played by grass and mist respectively within compositions in segments 4 and 8: nature’s formidable mystery. The jungle sequence lends thematic contrast to the plot in segment 1, in which nature appears comparatively harmonious, and human life thrives in comparison to the opening voiceover’s skeptical narration.

Pictorial shots typically appear in conjunction with the ambiguous narration of the unidentified voiceover. Whereas viewers might otherwise overlook the latent meaning in pictorial imagery, the voiceover narration's obliqueness encourages viewers to find visual explanation from the pictorial compositions’ implied themes. The technique starkly contrasts Badlands’ presentation, in which the voiceover narrates almost all of the film’s action, minimizing the viewer’s role in creating meaning. The Thin Red Line attempts to effect viewers’ active participation in assembling the measured cues that the film imparts.

The mindset that pictorial shots encourage from the film’s outset become particularly important at its conclusion, when the film prompts viewers to make the connection between nature and God. The film accordingly changes its presentation from the opening sequence by presenting shots in which nature appears at peace rather than at war. The thematic shift begins with Witt’s death and flashback (segments 12 and 12a). While Witt’s flashback suggests the collective soul theme, aforementioned in the narration section, the film also presents the flashback’s Utopian imagery as though representative of Witt’s heaven. In segment 12a, after the Japanese kill Witt, the film
cuts to the same shot from the opening sequence of light shining through the leaves of the canopy’s jungle. The film changes the shot’s implications, where once it presented nature at war with itself, through the Utopian score motif in the soundtrack and the shot’s association with the utopian island’s heavenly imagery. Through subsequent shots of children swimming in the bright blue ocean water, the sequence infers a sense of otherworldliness: the flashback breaks immediately with the time and space of the climactic plot event that produces the sequence, and lifts viewers into a comparative Utopia.

The closing sequence builds upon the formal presentation of Witt’s death and flashback. The final sequence adopts the Utopian score to contrast the sequence’s meaning with the formidable opening shots. As aforementioned in the narration section, three pictorial shots appear beneath the voiceover’s sanctified narration – two people canoeing into the jungle’s background, two lovebirds on a branch, and a small rock in the shore from which small green leaves emerge (segment 13). The Utopian score’s cues encourage viewers to recall Witt’s end in order to make sense of the voiceover’s reverent narration and the pictorial sequence. The sequence’s complex design evokes thematic meaning through multiple stylistic systems: pictorial compositions onscreen, the holy tone of the voiceover’s reverent narration, and the score motif reminiscent of Witt’s heavenly world. To successfully reveal the thematic presence of God, the film demands the viewer’s willingness to absorb the film’s multiple cues and assemble the sequence’s underlying meaning.
In order to activate the viewers’ mindsets, The Thin Red Line positions viewers to confront the combat experience – the events that compel the characters’ curiosity in the film’s themes. The film presents subjectively stylized sequences from characters’ points of view in order to align viewers’ and characters’ understandings of the film’s world. Outside of any specific character’s perspective, the film imbues the narrative’s presentation with the battlefield’s atmosphere, positioning viewers as though they are soldiers in C-Company. The sequence in which Sgt. McCron begins to lose his grip exemplifies a subjective stylistic presentation that aligns viewers with McCron’s understanding of the film’s world. Otherwise, the film’s strategic placement of its camera, shot scale, hand-held camera movement, and variation between short and long takes, emulate the plot’s dangerous chaos, and create the effect of viewers’ firsthand experience. The stylistic portrayal of war’s brutality instills in viewers a willingness to ponder the thematic questions that the chaos leads characters to ask.

Segment 4, which features the film’s most intense combat sequences, subjectively portrays certain sequences to emulate for the viewer the feeling of undergoing war’s trauma. After viewers learn that Sgt. McCron lost all twelve of his men to enemy fire, the film presents a sixty-eight second sequence over five shots that illustrate his subjective state.\(^{24}\) The sequence opens with a close shot scale of McCron’s face as he crouches in the grass, trembling manically amidst a din of explosive sound effects. For thirteen seconds, each of his tremors creates quivering movement in the frame compounded by small jerks from the hand-held camera, creating unsettling effects on viewers. Half way through the shot, the film signals that viewers are entering

\(^{24}\) See Appendix for Shot Breakdown.
McCron’s mind by quieting the battle’s sound effects and intensifying an atonal string sound. The sound grows louder over the subsequent POV shot, confirming that viewers now see the world through McCron’s eyes. The film depicts McCron’s faltering mental condition through a slow motion shot of soldiers running to their deaths, as the atonal sound wipes out the battlefield’s sound effects. From the POV shot’s subjective stylization, viewers understand McCron’s inner condition in the following shot when he fends off Capt. Staros as he runs by. But the disorienting cut from the POV shot deviates from the expected pattern of returning to the previous camera position. The camera cuts to a new position below McCron, who sits with his back to the action previously presented from his point of view.

Thus the film’s cues in shot 3 encourage viewers to understand McCron’s inner state from his POV shot, but also challenge their own grasps on the organization of time and space. In shot 4, the sequence returns to a slow-motion POV shot, indicated through the intensifying atonal sound but again complicated by McCron’s previously opposite position sitting on the hill. This time, the camera moves forward through the grass as men run past into the fray. The camera tilts up and down more drastically to portray McCron’s struggle, before tilting all the way down to the grass, fading to black for a split second as though he has fallen. When the sequence cuts to shot 5, the camera position returns to shot 1’s angle, direction and approximate shot scale on McCron’s face. Shot 5 reverses shot 1, quieting the atonal sound amidst the sound of McCron’s trembling breaths and clinking dog tags, as he tries to hold on to something real reading the information on his dog tags.
The sequence’s subjective style conveys Sgt. McCron’s wavering sanity by using editing to throw viewers off-balance, disorienting a consistent presentation of time and space. The sequence suggests that certain shots appear through McCron’s point of view through subjective sound and slow-motion. But the sequence throws the suggestion into doubt when the shots before and after present McCron facing another direction or not matching the action presented through his seeming point of view. Thus the film cues viewers both to sympathize with McCron’s growing insanity by seeing the world through his point of view, as well as to experience confusion similar to McCron’s reaction to trauma.

For the narrative events presented outside of a specific character’s point of view, the film’s use of style conveys the action in a fashion that mimics the battlefield’s atmosphere. In the narrative structure, the film consistently posits the viewer with whichever group of characters is closest to the front line, designing the viewer’s role as the unlucky private selected to risk his life. In segment 5a, the narrative parts with the company at large, following Pvt. Bell’s party up the hill, and continuing with Bell when he leaves the group to go the last leg alone. The film’s style enhances the role created for the viewer in the narrative structure through the camera’s strategic positions, cutting to the enemy, and the use of hand-held movement. In segment 5a, the camera is positioned in the middle of the group, following behind soldiers with the jerky movement of a climbing body. When the camera is not grouped with the soldiers placing the viewer in line of fire, the film cuts to close-ups of the soldiers’ faces. The shots reveal the fear in their eyes, implying what it means for the viewer to be
positioned in the group. When Capt. Gaff’s advancing party finally comes under siege in segment 6, the longer takes exposing the latent danger at the top of the hill in segment 5a grow comparatively shorter and more chaotic. Quicker cuts once again present a discontinuous presentation of time and space, disjointing the presentation of time and space to suggest that the viewer could be caught off-guard at any moment. Once again, the jerky hand-held camera movement creates a visual disorder that enhances the disorder unfolding in the plot. Whereas viewers do not share the physical peril of the soldiers among whom they watch the action unfold, the film translates the characters’ chaos into cinematic devices capable of creating a similar disorder in the viewing experience.

The film’s themes often require viewers’ willingness to piece together their meaning through a complex presentation of cues in pictorialism, voiceover narration, and sound. The film attempts to foster that mindset by confronting viewers with the combat experiences that lead characters to ask the film’s thematic questions. Through the secondary stylistic devices of discontinuous editing, subjective and objective sound effects, and the visual chaos of handheld camera movement, the film presents characters’ subjective experiences and designs the viewer’s own role in the company to feel equally prone. The film stylistically incorporates the viewer in the soldiers’ experience, aiding the collective soul theme’s portrayal through the viewer’s inclusion in C-Company. The viewer’s visceral position in close proximity to war’s mortal danger allows the underlying themes to come forth all the more effectively.
Conclusion

The most probable reason, if a single reason exists, for the underwhelmed response to *The Thin Red Line* relates to the film’s design of the viewer’s role. Compared to Malick’s earlier work, the film’s cues require more active participation from viewers in order to reveal underlying themes, which are central to the film’s primary goals. Although *The Thin Red Line* evidences a mature understanding, and elaborate use, of the film medium, the average viewer is not Martin Scorsese. Given the film’s wide commercial marketing, but demanding expectations of the viewer’s role, *The Thin Red Line*’s box office performance is no great surprise. Nor is it unexpected that the film performed more favorably with highbrow audiences, perhaps willing to exert a greater effort for a filmmaker’s reappearance after twenty years.

Nevertheless, *Thin Red Line* is valuable in Malick’s body of work for its ambitious and strategic experimentation, with the film medium and narrative storytelling, in order to reveal the distinct concerns of his cinematic universe. The film displays Malick’s most elaborate conception of voiceover, his most prominent implementation of pictorialism, and many of the narrative and stylistic structures he will rework in the presentation of *The New World*. Where *The New World* relinquishes *The Thin Red Line*’s more ambiguous elements, such as flashback sequences and unidentified voiceover, *The New World* maintains stylistic devices that enhance character subjectivity to more closely align viewers with the characters’ universe. The primary distinction that affects the subsequent film’s presentation from its predecessor is in the transformation of thematic curiosity to thematic conviction. Where characters
in *The Thin Red Line* wonder about the connection of humans, nature and God, characters that appear in *The New World* are certain of it. As a result, the viewing experience is transformed from one of grappling with the themes that the film suggests, to accepting the themes that the film defines.
Chapter 4.

The New World (2005)

Malick’s fourth feature tells the part-historic part-folkloric tale of the English settlement in Jamestown, 1607. In the confrontation between colonists and the native Powhatans, John Smith and Pocahontas must negotiate the inherent conflicts between their loyalty to their people and their love for one another.  

---

25 For a complete segmentation, see Appendix.
The techniques with which Terrence Malick constructs *The New World* finally result in a film that encourages equilibrium between viewers’ compassion for the characters and awe of the natural world. Malick’s films have attempted to effect the viewing experience since *Badlands*. While Malick’s use of the film medium in *The Thin Red Line* is fascinating from a scholar’s perspective, the film does not accomplish its goals in the immediate viewing experience. In order to create effective cues for viewers’ empathy and awe, *The New World* targets two attributes of *The Thin Red Line*’s presentation for revision: its ambiguity and its scale. *The New World* draws sharper focus in its presentation, revealing themes that are conclusive rather than open-ended, while moderating the ambiguity of their stylistic presentation. Furthermore, *The New World* returns to the method used successfully in *Days of Heaven*, magnifying the presentation of a smaller story rather than undertaking the stories of an entire military company. The choice to focus primarily on only three characters’ plotlines relieves *The New World* of the indigestible complexity that frequently muddles *The Thin Red Line*’s cues for the viewing experience.

Professionally, and thematically, *The New World* is a revelation. The film’s construction evidences careful consideration of Malick’s cinematic goals, previously successful strategies, and the structural choices that make his goals more readily attainable. At the most basic level, the film clarifies and simplifies the three-part theme with which *The Thin Red Line* related humans, nature and God. *The New World* defines the relationship among the categories as wholly unified – not simply connected, but all as one. To reconcile themes’ previously ambiguous presentation, Malick selects an
American story in which he sees the relationship among humans, nature and God at the helm. From the historic English colony in Jamestown, and the folkloric love story between John Smith and Pocahontas, Malick seizes upon the notion of people discovering a new world. The historical narrative’s essential attribute manifests itself in the film’s ability to create worlds defined in opposition to one another, yet positioned adjacently in space. Rather than departing from the space of one world without returning, as in previous narratives, *The New World* locates those spaces contiguously, enabling the characters to travel back and forth between them. The use of space enables the film to reveal its themes more lucidly by juxtaposing the worlds’ two distinct ways of life.

*The New World* presents its characters as controlled by the larger forces of the worlds to which they belong, as in *Days of Heaven*, while simultaneously presenting the intensity of the characters’ subjective experiences, as in *The Thin Red Line*. The film combines narrative and stylistic techniques from the two earlier films. As with both predecessors, causally driven plotlines drive the overarching narrative structure, although the film presents those plotlines in a largely episodic fashion. Furthermore, the narrative time onscreen that does not constitute a plot event functions to illustrate and juxtapose the film’s inner worlds: the colonists’ settlement and the Powhatans’ village. To illustrate the unity among humans, nature and God that underlies *The New World*’s story, the film recreates *The Thin Red Line*’s balance between subjective and objective style. The main stylistic tools that the film employs to illustrate its themes are
voiceover narration, pictorialism, and discontinuous or overlapping editing that cinematically depicts subjective experiences.

Theme

*The New World*'s specific argument on the recurring themes in Malick’s films reveals humans, nature and God as spiritually indistinguishable, simply manifested in different physical forms. The film contrasts its two inner worlds by highlighting the culture that each community fosters and their acknowledgments of the spiritual unity theme. From this comparison, the film’s title proposes a twist to the folkloric narrative that it retells: the film’s narrative presents the New World as the modernized civilization of England, and the Powhatan civilization as the natural world, maintaining an unaffected spiritual tradition. The film portrays the natural world with reverence, and the New World with contempt.

The film visualizes its theme onscreen in the design contrast between the two communities. The film first fully reveals the Powhatan village in segment 3 when John Smith approaches their Chief. The Powhatans’ village seamlessly coexists with nature without barriers from the surrounding forest and fields. Their houses, weaponry, clothes and make-up share the same construction materials, all derived from crude natural elements: animal fur and feathers, natural dyes and mud, sticks, stones, and bark. The tribe establishes its village as would any animal species, using indigenous resources to build a habitat, displaying no evidence of considering themselves to be distinct from the natural world at large. Although the colonists refer to “the naturals”
with implied condescension, the film admiringly depicts the Powhatans living in concert with nature.

The colonists’ disdain for nature, and thus their inherent ignorance of the spiritual unity among humans, nature, and God, materializes in the visual contrast between their community’s design and the tribe’s. Upon arriving on land, the colonists immediately isolate themselves from nature (segment 2). To create a settlement, the colonists strip bare an area of land, remove tree trunks’ bark and leaves, and erect a fortress between themselves and the natural world. The colonists’ artillery consists of gunpowder and muskets – constructed from man-made rather than natural materials, the tools function to inflict or prevent bodily harm. The colonists’ inorganic lifestyle comes forward with particular clarity in segment 6, when Pocahontas’ governess civilizes her. The process entails conforming her style of dress to the constrictive footwear, corset and long skirts of English society. The sequence’s tone presents the costume as senseless, a human construction of no practical utility, as Pocahontas struggles to walk upright in her new clothes.

In the transition from segment 3 to segment 4, the film makes its clearest argument about the distinction between the two worlds. At the beginning of segment 4, John Smith returns from his so-called captivity in the relatively liberated Powhatan village, a setting defined by the bountiful presence of nature in which the community thrived. Upon reentering the colonists’ fortress, Smith opens the gates to reveal its stark desolation, disease and death. Outside of the fortress’ walls, nature abounds with materials from which the Powhatans constructed their wellbeing. Removed from the
natural world, the colonists perish from their self-imposed isolation – even grass stops at their settlement’s walls, inside of which are only pools of mud. Rather than look for food, the colonists ravage the earth looking for gold – a material with man-made value, of no practical use in sustaining their wellbeing. From the comparison of the communities’ attributes, the film presents the colonists as arrogant and senseless, conceiving of humans as superior to nature and dying from such a notion. When Smith reenters the fort from the lush world in the forest, there is no sign of life, human or natural, as he describes, “Bad water. Sturgeon gone.” Smith categorizes the distinction between the two worlds in no uncertain terms, “Damnation is like this. The country is to them...a hell,” (segment 4). Reminiscent of Days of Heaven and The Thin Red Line, the film measures godliness by the harmonious coexistence of man and nature. The thematic argument for hell on earth appears visually as a world deprived of nature, and created by the characters’ insistence on a New World way of life. The film presents its partiality plainly in its screenwriting, as Pocahontas and Smith often refer to life in the natural world as “true,” and life in the New World as “false.”

The film’s judgments are not directed toward the characters themselves, but toward the values that each world instills in its members. Pocahontas, therefore, embodies all that the film’s central theme admires. John Rolfe, who Pocahontas marries after Smith leaves Jamestown, adeptly describes her embodiment of the film’s central theme in the phrase, “She weaves all things together,” (segment 8). From her love of John Smith, it follows that his characterization would distinguish him from the colony at large. In contrast to other colonists, when John Smith arrives in Jamestown,
he first examines and appreciates his natural surroundings – the choice that leads him to Pocahontas (segment 1). He criticizes the colonists who dig for gold and demands that they build a well, thus bringing the natural world into their space and improving their livelihood (segment 4). In segment 3, when introduced to the Powhatans’ way of life, Smith realizes that those concepts condemned as sins in the New World are in fact creations of New World:

“The Powhatans are gentle, loving, faithful, lacking in all guile and trickery. The words denoting lying, deceit, greed, envy, slander and forgiveness, have never been heard. They have no jealousy. No sense of possession.”

His character’s realization makes clear his incentive to exchange his “false” life for a “true” one, given the evils he discovers both born and denounced from within his colony. Smith’s plotline revolves around the conflict between his sensitivity to the film’s central theme, and the world from which he cannot, or will not, escape.

In conjunction with its reverent presentation of the Powhatans’ spiritually unified lifestyle, the film draws attention to New World cultural norms that reveal deficiency of substantive meaning. Two key targets emerge: language and religion. Perhaps the most salient element of Pocahontas’ characterization is that she need never be referred to by name in order to have a commanding presence in the film’s universe. In fact, in his yearning to escape his New World life, John Smith follows “exchange this false life for a true one,” with a definitive example of the film’s attitudes, “give up the name of Smith,” (segment 5). To communicate with John Smith in segment 3, Pocahontas physically embodies the words he translates – sky, sun, water and wind – performing her interpretation of their essences. Her character is the thematic vehicle for exposing deficiencies in the New World’s empty cultural norms. When questioned on New
World definitions of time and space, John Rolfe cannot devise a definition with any more substantive meaning – “An hour is...sixty minutes,” (segment 6). The film’s critical attitude toward language reflects and enables Malick’s penchant for non-verbal storytelling, discussed below. The climactic portrayal of Smith and Pocahontas’ romance occurs when they need not speak to each other in words, communicating only through the dialogue of their unspoken thoughts and feelings, “Can love lie?” “My America,” (segment 5).

The film’s underlying theme also disfavors the New World notion of Christianity in favor of a spirituality that equates humans, nature and God. However, the film sets an obstacle for itself, as proved by The Thin Red Line’s oblique cues, in how visually to represent God’s presence onscreen. Because the film’s central theme argues that those entities are spiritually indistinguishable from one another, the film visualizes those categories onscreen interchangeably. As aforesaid, the Powhatans mimic and overlap with the natural world. In following, the film establishes that humans and nature believably can invoke God’s presence. The film portrays this representation, in part, through Pocahontas’ plotline with John Smith. Pocahontas initially refers to God as an Earth Mother, a characterization that unites her spirituality with her awe of the natural world. As the character that “weaves all things together,” the film goes on to define Pocahontas’ love of Smith as equivalent to her faith in God.

For Pocahontas, the power of falling in love is a spiritual experience. She expresses the feeling as “a god he seems to me...I will be faithful to you,” continuing, “we rise, we rise,” an affirmation that Pocahontas earlier defines as an expression of her
faith. Her prayer continues, “I am, I am,” over a shot of running water (segment 3). This statement is the paramount example of her character’s embodiment of the film’s themes. Her complete immersion in the feelings that she has for John leads her to the notion that she exists as their love, as truly as water runs over rocks. Thus, the film presents the love that grows between them not merely as a plotline but as a fact of Pocahontas’ world that is as real as the water’s tide. The film’s evidence confirms this fact when Smith leaves Pocahontas to return to England. She declares definitively, “You have gone away with my life, killed the God in me,” (segment 7). When their romance falters, so too does her faith in God; as the character who embodies the film’s central theme, her loss of Smith affects her understanding of all other things.

Founded on love, the film presents the conviction of Pocahontas’ spirituality in contrast to the emptiness, if not cruelty, in the colonists’ religious expressions. For example, in segment 7, the colonists christen Pocahontas – a ritual for which the natural world’s equivalent arguably would be birth – solely to name her Rebecca. Brought to light by Pocahontas’ confusion over the event’s purpose, the film presents the sacrament like the name, unsubstantiated by any natural meaning, an empty New World ritual. The film makes the same argument at the beginning of segment 2, when the Powhatans explore the new colony. The film inserts a shot in which the tribesmen encounter an erected edifice without an evident practical function – the structure is a large wooden cross. The shot functions to reveal the colonists’ religious beliefs as false, arguing that God should be something you can see and feel around you, and that the colonists’ crucifix is lacking in any spiritual evidence.
Meaningless is among the more flattering lights in which the film presents the New World’s religion. The colonists’ faith often is portrayed as a form of cruelty, particularly through the character of Eddie. His character’s draconian interpretation of religion appears in the film’s most violent scenes, such as the battle between the two worlds, and John Smith’s consequent punishment, in segment 5. Eddie incites the colonists’ unwarranted attack during a standstill in their battle with the Powhatans, calling the tribe “…heathen bastards! Seeds of Sulfur! Sons of fire! Devils in the mouth of hell!” (segment 5). The screenwriting characterizes Eddie’s cruelty by his vicious piety. The film’s use of parallel scenes is a key strategy to contrast the two worlds. In the segment’s later scene, when Eddie lashes Smith for his alleged treason, he rants practically unintelligible prayers for Smith’s good health in a direct address to the camera. Over this sequence, the film inserts Pocahontas’ quiet, sincere voiceover, “You touch me now. In all things may I stand by you,” (segment 6). The positive, gentle nature of Pocahontas’ spirituality stands starkly in contrast to the brutality with which Eddie wields his faith. The film’s attitude towards Eddie’s abuse of religion is made all the more clear when juxtaposed with Pocahontas’ positive faith.

Finally, a climactic plot event revolves around the film’s thematic comparison between religious convention and spiritual authenticity. The narrative’s penultimate segment concludes with Pocahontas’ realization that John Smith is alive. When she expresses to John Rolfe that she cannot show him affection because she is “married to him,” again not calling Smith by name, he counters her with “Marriage? You don’t know the meaning of the word, exactly,” (segment 7). From their interaction, the film
highlights the difference between New World and natural world beliefs. Pocahontas may not understand the marital ritual’s rules, but she understands what love is, and feels it with utmost devotion. The narrative does not present the marriage of Pocahontas and Rolfe as a reflection of their love. To the contrary, the film acknowledges that their marriage occurs without her loving him, and his recognition of that fact – “you do not love me now, but one day you will,” (segment 7). In contrasting Pocahontas’ marriage to John Rolfe and her love of John Smith, the film argues that New World rituals signify nothing as compared with the passion of the human heart, where true godliness resides.

The comparison is a key tactic with which the film substantiates its argument for spiritual unity - an argument with which the film intends that viewers should align, not merely comprehend, as was the wide result from The Thin Red Line’s techniques. The New World’s strategies illustrate its central theme more comprehensibly, creating more effective cues to inspire the viewers’ awe of the natural world. The film contrasts the two worlds in contiguous spaces, thus enabling the narrative to alternate between them rather than abandoning one for the other as in Malick’s prior films. The proximity of, and rotation between, the two worlds lends clarity to the film’s visualization of its central thematic argument. The film defines two ways to live: the colonists’ way - cut off, physically by their fort and spiritually by their will, from the land around them, and the Powhatans’ way - spiritually connected to all that they see, a tribe for whom nature is an integral and sacred source of their wellbeing. From the straightforward juxtaposition, the film encourages viewers’ compassion for the
Powhatans’ tribe and Pocahontas the protagonist, and cues viewers to assume Powhatan worldviews for their own viewing experience.

Narrative

While *The New World*’s narrative structure mostly is typical of Malick’s films, key revisions to *The Thin Red Line*’s structure encourage the desired viewing experience more effectively. At 135 minutes, *The New World*’s length is nearer to *The Thin Red Line*’s than Malick’s earlier films. However, *The New World* revises the previous film’s narrative structure to include fewer segments – eight rather than thirteen. By reducing the number of narrative segments, the film presents its central theme’s illustration in a less isolated fashion from the advancing plot. Maintaining the plot’s overarching causality for the segments’ forward movement, the story more effectively sustains viewers’ engagement and increases the likelihood of achieving the intended viewing experience. Finally, the film reduces its modes of narration, employing only the three main characters’ (identifiable) voiceovers. Voiceover narration’s function shifts from serving the plot to illustrating the central theme according to its speaker’s recognition of the film’s thematic argument.

*The New World*’s narrative transitions from plot events to thematic arguments without rupturing the story’s presentation. The absence of rupture marks the film’s distinct success with a familiar narrative structure. The central spiritual theme appears in episodes from their exploration of the film’s opposing worlds. The episodes convey each world’s way of life, the respective understanding or ignorance of the film’s central spiritual theme, and how that awareness affects the way in which each world functions.
Plot and theme are closely enough connected, in the narrative’s structure and simply in the story, that the film’s presentation maintains cohesion and consistency – the greater fragility of which in *The Thin Red Line* likely caused viewers to disengage. The thematic episodes augment rather than distract from the plot, making a less conspicuous impact on the narrative’s pace. The film’s tighter narrative structure presents a more absorbing story, which makes all the more likely viewers’ attentiveness to the film’s cues, and thus their experience of compassion and awe.

Segment 3’s dual function, in service of John Smith and Pocahontas’ plotline and the Powhatan village’s exposition, exemplifies the film’s overarching narrative structure. The segment opens with the resolution of a plot event from the previous segment: Pocahontas saves Smith’s life, and the Chief decides to let the colonists maintain their settlement for the time being. In a classically structured film, the film likely would cut directly to the subsequent interaction between the two romantic leads. Instead, the film cuts to a sequence of shots within the space of the village that portrays the Powhatan lifestyle onscreen for over a minute. The sequence includes shots of Powhatans picking corn, practicing archery, and a long take as Smith and the camera wander through the village independently of one another. When the film finally cuts to the main characters’ exchange, the film intercuts even that sequence with shots of Powhatans engaging in daily activity: children chasing each other, women making bowls and cleaning stones. The soundtrack includes no score that prompts viewers to respond to what they see in a certain fashion, only the Powhatan village’s sound effects. The film encourages viewers merely to look around, precisely as Smith does, exploring
the Powhatan community and its differences from the colonists’ settlement, most notably the way in which the Powhatan community thrives off of nature’s abundant resources.

The sequence’s structure changes the meaning of the plot event that it features. Whereas in a classical film the scene would function to introduce a love interest, Smith’s encounter with Pocahontas simultaneously introduces his character, and the viewer, to a new world and a new way of living in it. The film’s central themes enrich, rather than distract from, her character, as she appears to represent a new and profound connection between humans and nature. The film defines two opposing lifestyles that the narrative juxtaposes. The juxtaposition appears with particular clarity in the transition from segment 3, in which life in the Powhatan village prospers, to segment 4, in which death consumes those inside the fort, mentioned in the section above. From this sequence, segment 3 proceeds to Smith’s voiceover, another essential device in the story’s narration.

The narrative structure configures its voiceover narration in a pattern that reflects and enhances the film’s story apart from anything spoken in the voiceover’s content. Before the credit sequence, viewers enter the film’s world through Pocahontas’ voiceover narration. But after the credit sequence, when the first narrative segment formally begins, voiceover narration belongs to John Smith. The segment serves as an alternative to the exposition provided by Pocahontas’ opening narration - hers an exposition of themes, John Smith’s an exposition of the plot. However, the voiceover pattern shifts in segment 3, echoing the narrative as it portrays John Smith
and Pocahontas’ burgeoning romance. Although both characters appeared together as early as segment 1, not until their characters fall in love does the film’s narration alternate between them within one segment. The union of the two voiceovers’ in the segment’s narration parallels the characters’ romantic union within the plot. The shift from Pocahontas’ inner voice to Smith’s immerses the viewer doubly in the romance that the characters share, experiencing the characters’ love from his perspective and then from hers.

Voiceover narration’s structure reaches a climax in segment 5. After segment 4’s plot events separate Smith and Pocahontas, segment 5 most effectively conveys the intensity of their reconnection through the pattern of their voiceovers. While segment 3 features three sections of voiceover, Smith’s followed by Pocahontas’ followed by Smith’s, segment 5 intersperses their narration as though the characters are speaking to each other. Pocahontas’ voiceover has been established from its first appearance as the vessel through which she communicates with God. As someone who makes no distinction among humans, nature, and God, Pocahontas’ voiceover speaking to Smith in segment 5 confirms his godly status in her eyes. From this pattern, the film conveys that the characters communicate spiritually, unified with one another as an exemplary part of the theme’s unified world. Had the content of their voiceovers appeared in dialogue rather than voiceover, the effect of would have been far weaker. An interaction in dialogue would not convey the film’s central theme that their connection is so great that they share one spirit through which they communicate wordlessly. Perhaps even more significant, the connection in voiceover between Smith and
Pocahontas is evidence that the central spiritual theme is not one to which the Powhatans have divine access, but rather one that all humans share.

The function of the film’s voiceover narration shifts according to the narrating character – Pocahontas, John Smith, or John Rolfe – and the character’s ties to natural world or New World beliefs. Each of them employs voiceover for alternate narrative sections. The voiceovers commonly give subjective access to the given character’s inner emotions, but otherwise share no universal function. For Rolfe, who never gains access to the world Smith enters in segment 3, voiceover serves primarily a narrative function. His voiceover typically appears to contextualize or narrate unseen events. For example, while getting to know Pocahontas after he arrives in Virginia, Rolfe says in voiceover, “The loss of my own wife and daughter has led me to understand her loss as well,” (segment 7). His family never appeared onscreen, and bears no further impact on the narrative. But Rolfe’s mention of them in voiceover provides plot exposition, explaining his character’s deep connection to Pocahontas at a juncture when her suffering alienates most of those around her.

At the opposite end of the voiceover spectrum, Pocahontas’ voiceover serves a thematic purpose, providing cues for the audience to assemble the film’s thematic argument. Whereas Rolfe’s voiceover functions similarly to a journal, Pocahontas’ voiceover immediately appears as the vessel through which she speaks to God. The film’s first words are spoken in Pocahontas’ voiceover, addressing her Earth Mother, and illustrate the thematic argument through her voiceover’s content:

“Come spirit, help us sing this story of our land. You are our mother. We, your field of corn. We rise from out of the soul of you,” (segment 1).
Using earthly imagery, Pocahontas identifies the subject of her narration as her God, and makes no distinction between humans and nature: both rise from the same Earth Mother’s soul. In following, when Pocahontas falls deeply in love with John Smith, the film further illustrates his godly stature in her eyes by instating him as the intended object of her voiceover narration in place of her Earth Mother. Pocahontas’ voiceover narration is distinct from Rolfe’s in its designated listener, as well as its narrated content. Both Pocahontas and Rolfe express emotions and ask private questions in voiceover, such as Rolfe’s, “Who are you? What do you dream of?” (segment 7) when he first meets Pocahontas, or her insecure “Am I as you like?” when she first sees Smith after her governess dresses her in English clothes (segment 6). However, Pocahontas’ voiceover never serves the plot by illuminating unseen events, but instead acts as her method of communicating with God, nature and even other humans, on a spiritual level.

For Smith, trapped in his New World life while his heart longs for the natural world, voiceover alternately serves the exposition of both plot and theme. Like Rolfe, Smith’s voiceover often functions more conventionally, describing action unseen in the plot. For example, his final voiceover narration barely indicates that the narrated content affects his character’s plotline, describing at a distance,

“The ships returned firing their canons, causing the naturals to sue for peace. The tide now swung to the English side,” (segment 7).

However, for Rolfe’s narration that expresses his character’s subjective experience, his questions only ever ponder his feelings for Pocahontas or the state of their relationship.
When Smith’s voiceover expresses his subjective experience, the narration considers a whole new way of life and Pocahontas as its quintessence. His love for her is inextricable from his consideration of her world and escaping his own, as he pines, “To go back up that river. To love her, in the wild,” (segment 4). Smith’s voiceover mimics Pocahontas’ in the fleeting instance in which he questions, “Who are you who I so faintly hear...What is this voice that speaks within me?” (segment 2). Having just seen Pocahontas for the first time in the film, the reference to another voice speaking within him implies that his character is momentarily touched by spiritual awareness. But while Smith’s voiceover endorses the film’s central theme that humans, nature and God are spiritually indistinguishable, like his character his voiceover does not commit to the defining spirituality of Pocahontas’ voiceover.

Thus, *The New World* combines strengths from prior films’ narrative structures in order to maintain the plot, as well as to reveal central themes through subjective expressions in voiceover, and still to maintain viewer engagement. The film tells a story with as much thematic exploration as *The Thin Red Line*, but in a fewer segments. The overarching structure maintains plot as the cause for segment transitions, lending a more cohesive story arc than *The Thin Red Line*’s abstracted sequences. The previous film’s abstracted treatment of thematic arguments often ruptures the connection between plot and theme. *The New World*’s plot includes cues that encourage viewers to accept the film’s central theme: John Smith, a historical character associated with more commonly depicted imagery of Jamestown, emerges from the Powhatan village with the decisive response, “There is only this. All else is unreal,” (segment 3). *The New World*
abandons The Thin Red Line’s more ambiguous uses of voiceover, the most conceptually difficult narration in the prior film. However, The New World maintains voiceover as a tool with which to achieve thematic complexity. Pocahontas, the representative character of the film’s idealized world, suggests the film’s central theme in her voiceover and alerts viewers to the awe-inspiring natural world in which the plot takes place. Instead of siding against either John Smith or John Rolfe, the film’s three voiceover narrators suggest that viewers consider each of their points of view. Finally, the voiceover narration’s structure across the narrative intensifies viewers’ experience of the leading characters’ plotlines and appeals to a less selectively sympathetic viewer response. The film’s revisions to its predecessor’s narrative structure allow for clearer thematic cues and a deeper relationship between viewer and character. Therefore, the viewing experience comes within closer reach of Malick’s ideals: compassion and awe.

Style

The New World’s central theme poses the cinematic obstacle of invoking the presence of God onscreen in a believable fashion for viewers. However, the film unambiguously approaches the film’s world through a character that sees godliness all around her. Days of Heaven overcame this obstacle by characterizing Linda’s god-fearing narration as childlike. That film presented the plot’s biblical acts simultaneously as forces of nature and as unbelievable to the characters within the world of the film as to viewers. The Thin Red Line overcame this obstacle by highlighting God’s absence, drawing into question the presence of godliness in the natural world, for viewers to assemble should they respond to the cues in that manner. Finally, in his fourth film,
Malick’s answer to the question of how to evince spirituality from nature and humans alike, is the definitive example of his distinctiveness as a filmmaker and among the most significant solutions of his career. The solution is a stylistic combination of voiceover narration, pictorialism, and editing.

The theme that creates Malick’s cinematic problem also bears its solution: if God shares a spiritual unity with humans and nature, then godliness can appear through shots of humans and nature and remain within the film world’s definition of verisimilitude. Furthermore, the story does not take place in the natural world – the story takes place on film. Malick uses cinema in his depiction of the natural world and its characters to evoke the presence of God. The film defines these terms in its opening sequence through pictorial shots of nature, only to betray and redefine the terms for godliness through discontinuous editing.

*The New World*’s opening sequence exemplifies its overall use of style to portray its challenging central theme. Before the credit sequence, and the “Jamestown 1607” supertitle that locates the film in time and space, the film inserts two shots and a few lines of voiceover narration. This simple sequence represents humans, nature and God as unified rather than discrete entities. To do so, the film employs Malick’s defining stylistic tools: pictorialism and voiceover narration. The shots purposefully are not as pictorial as the images upon which *The Thin Red Line* opened, in which the compositions visibly displayed nature at war with itself. Instead, the film defines God as a presence that will not be visualized onscreen, but spoken to through voiceover and
found while looking at imagery of nature. The sequence is pictorial, but not the shots’ compositions alone.

The pictorial sequence suggests each component of the film’s central theme through formal means, and supports those suggestions through the voiceover’s narrated content. The use of voiceover adds the theme’s human component, the body of running water in the shot’s composition adds the element of nature, and the function of Pocahontas’ voiceover as a device through which she speaks to God adds the presence of spirituality. Further to suggest the unification of these elements, the sequence adjoins an additional shot of Pocahontas reaching towards the sky in prayer. The sky presents the element of nature, Pocahontas herself is the human element, and her staging acts as an acknowledgement of God.

The sequence supports the central theme’s formal presentation through the content narrated in voiceover. From the moment it begins, the narration addresses the story’s spirituality by defining a godly presence as a term of the film’s universe. The camera tracks over a body of water in a long take, as Pocahontas’ voiceover addresses her Earth Mother, transcribed above. The narration conveys first her world’s spirituality, through the object of the voiceover’s address; then connects the nature to the spirit in question; then connects the land and humans; and finally connects human beings, land, and the spirit as all rising from the same soul. In other words, God exists in the film because Pocahontas addresses her, and then defines her earthly manifestations: humans and nature.
Although the opening sequence’s formal presentation embodies all of the central theme’s elements, the cues are too ambiguous and too early to convey definite meaning to the viewer. From the sequence, viewers more likely grasp that the film’s world includes voiceover narration – they could venture that Pocahontas will be a central character, and they likely suspect that whatever her narration’s content actually implies will be a defining theme in the film. Even if the sequence leads viewers to only that minimal understanding, viewers still enter the film with the knowledge that an alternative way of life exists than the one illustrated before segment 3. Discovering the thematic argument over the course of the film’s presentation requires this viewing mindset, in which viewers are willing to explore an alternative world. Even if viewers do not register that characters access God through the voiceover device, the reentry of Pocahontas’ voiceover narration in segment 3 clearly presents that trait, building upon the foundation for her voiceover’s function laid by the opening sequence.

The film’s cues that its universe evokes God’s presence aurally rather than visually are a red herring. Among the several functions of Pocahontas’ voiceover discussed above, the device provides a necessary diversion for viewers to prevent them from looking elsewhere for the alleged spirit to which the film refers. Although the film intermittently employs both voiceover narration and pictorialism to illustrate its central theme, Malick’s most distinctive stylistic solution in the film appears most often through the use of discontinuous editing. Through editing, the film not only solves the problem of how visually to illustrate spirituality, it guides the viewer to the same ephemeral experience of a spiritual presence felt by the characters in the film.
In three instances, a woman appears onscreen to evince Pocahontas’ Earth Mother. She first appears as Pocahontas and John Smith fall in love, during Pocahontas’ voiceover narration in segment 3. She reappears after Pocahontas’ friend dies in battle in segment 6. And she finally appears in segment 7, intercut with Pocahontas learning that Smith has drowned. From her casting, costume and make-up, the woman is indistinguishable from other Powhatans. Her stylistic presentation in the film makes her distinct where she would otherwise appear human. Each time she appears, the film presents her in no more than three shots, each of which lasts no more than one second – her first appearance is two shots, her second is one, and her third is three. Malick does not build upon, nor lead toward, the shots in the construction of the sequence in which they appear. The shots locate the woman in no specific time or place, but against a background that is distinctly of the film’s natural world. Finally, each of her shots presents her in dramatic contrast from others shots’ camera positions, angles, and shot scales.

The film’s depiction of the woman is just sufficiently extensive to register her presence in the viewer’s awareness, and sufficiently complicated to prevent viewers from fully grasping what they have seen. The woman materializes around conspicuous plot events for Pocahontas’ character. But the editing disorients viewers, by manipulating and limiting what they see to mere glints of her, before she disappears her again. Pocahontas – through whom viewers are led to believe the film invokes its spirituality – never appears in the same space as her Earth Mother, or gives any indication that the fleeting shots of the woman represent God. However, by the
woman’s third appearance, the editing style that obscures who and where she is draws viewers’ attention to the underlying meaning in the film that remains just beyond their reach.

From the viewer’s perspective, the technique imbues the film with a sense of spirituality, beyond the instances in which Pocahontas’ Earth Mother appears. The editing style is one often employed to portray the love scenes between Pocahontas and John Smith. The technique appears in the sequences that depict their falling in love (segment 3) as well as in their rediscovery of each other after the winter (segment 5). As with the Earth Mother, discontinuous shots divide the characters’ actions among a variety of glimpses that convey a feeling more strongly than they convey a specific event. The wide implementation of discontinuous editing imbues the film as a whole with a sense of spirituality that gains its spirit from the occasionally unrecognizable elements, such as the Earth Mother, that appear in brief shots.

The film’s editing presents glimpses of elements within the film’s universe that appear to exist independently of the film’s storytelling. From the short shot lengths and contrasting camera angles, the film continually uproots viewers at the moment in which they might come to comprehend the true meaning of what they see. Malick presents a woman who is indistinguishable from any other human, as in the film’s central argument. But the editing’s creation of her ephemeral presence transforms the woman into Pocahontas’ Earth Mother through a partnership of the film medium and the viewer’s inability to pin down her meaning. Malick uses cinema to create a God.
And because he defines her godliness through cinema, the willing viewer sees everything in the film’s universe, humans and nature, as godly.

**Viewing Experience**

*The New World*’s narrative and stylistic illustration of its themes successfully promotes a viewing experience defined by compassion for the characters and awe of the natural world. The effective result began with Malick’s initial decision to adapt a story well suited to his thematic fixations in order more effectively to bring forward the film’s central theme. The central thematic argument is simpler and more conclusive, thereby increasing the clarity of the film’s cues that the viewer uses to construct the meaning of the underlying argument. The multiple character subjectivity promoted from the film’s use of voiceover narration draws the viewers closer to the characters’ experience of their plotlines. The film presents the story as the product of the two worlds between which the film takes place, provoking the viewer’s compassionate response to the film’s characters and to the leading characters in particular.

The film provokes the viewer’s empathy for its leading characters, Pocahontas and John Smith, from stylistic devices beyond Malick’s familiar use of voiceover narration and point of view editing. For passionate scenes, in addition to assorted sequences across the film, characters’ actions and events appear in discontinuous montage. The portrayal’s editing conveys characters’ emotions more clearly than the depiction of a particular event. The editing technique similarly portrays the image of a woman, whose ephemeral presence and ambiguous role endow her with a spiritual presence that is defined distinctly by her cinematic depiction. Her spirituality is
created in a partnership between the viewers and the film medium. The film designs her presence in a minimal and disorienting fashion. Viewers identify that the film includes a layer just beyond their reach, by trying to assemble the film’s cues for her meaning. Never receiving cues that complete her meaning, viewers instead understand that the film’s presentation of its universe potentially portrays more than they can see onscreen, in the story’s humans and nature alike. This understanding guides viewers to experience the film with compassion for its characters, as aforesaid, and with an awe of the natural world.
Conclusion:

The Forest
This project sought to answer specific research questions in order more closely to define Terrence Malick’s cinematic universe: What are the recurring themes that Malick’s films reveal? Do Malick’s films have a common approach to narrative structure, and if so, to what effects on the viewing experience? Which stylistic devices define Malick’s aesthetic? How do those tools function to illustrate the films’ underlying themes? And how does one define the viewing experience that Malick’s cinematic universe effects? These research questions led to the following conclusions.

The recurring themes in Malick’s films interrelate humans, nature, and God, either drawing their connection into question or posing a specific argument that defines the relationships. *Badlands* features these themes most subtly, revealing a similarity between Kit’s instinctive lawlessness and the untamed wilderness of the badlands, as well as an interest in employing religiosity to illustrate the meaning of characters’ choices in key plot events. *Days of Heaven*’s central argument warns the human impulse against exerting control over the balance between nature and mankind, implying that the consequences to such actions can be nothing short of apocalyptic. *The Thin Red Line* proposes that mankind belongs to one shared soul. The film asks whether the cruelty that humans are capable of inflicting upon one another is a trend similarly visible in nature, and implies that nature’s all-mighty presence evinces the presence of God. Finally, *The New World* argues conclusively that humans, nature, and God are spiritually indistinguishable, merely manifested in different physical forms.

Malick’s films commonly reinvent an American historical narrative to reveal these underlying themes, whether from a notorious crime spree, the Western genre, the
combat genre, or the folkloric love story between John Smith and Pocahontas. From these stories, the films design two worlds in opposition to each other, one typically characterized by its embodiment of the film’s thematic ideals, the other that views humans, nature and God more discretely. The films employ a shared narrative structure, although Malick’s later films are nearly twice as long, in which causally driven narratives present their plotlines in a largely episodic fashion. From their different manifestations in each film, the narrative episodes nonetheless share the attribute of exploring the natural surroundings in which the films take place. The narratives structures position viewers to discover each film’s universe as larger than its characters’ plotlines. Increasingly from one film to the next, the film’s cues encourage viewer recognition of the universe as including not only the natural world, but spirituality that links humans, nature and God alike – a recognition encouraged by the narratives’ design of their episodes.

The stylistic techniques that define Malick’s aesthetic are voiceover narration and, later, pictorialism. Malick’s experimentation with voiceover narration is one of his elemental contributions to the film medium and evidences his mature understanding of its potential. His narrators vary in function from a conventional narrator in Badlands, a guide to the viewer’s experience as well as a platform for the film’s apocalyptic themes in Days of Heaven, a device that unifies the narrative’s characters in The Thin Red Line, and a forum in which to talk to God as in The Thin Red Line. With the possible exception of Badlands, voiceover narration is a central tool that the film uses to evoke its thematic arguments, either through the formal use of the
device or through the voiceover’s narrated content. Pictorialism, evident in Malick’s earlier films but prominent in his later work, functions to create shots that embody the film’s central thematic arguments, providing visual cues in meaning suggested by solitary shots. Pictorial shots appear more frequently in Malick’s later films corresponds to the general shift toward more suggestively presenting their themes. Thus although pictorial shots appear in Malick’s earlier films, in his later work they appear in longer takes, at points in the narrative structure designed to draw more attention to the shots’ compositions and represented arguments.

Malick’s later films are further distinguished from his earlier films in the way that they envision the role of the viewer. In *The Thin Red Line* and *The New World*, viewers have greater responsibility for the construction of meaning from the film’s cues, where Malick’s prior films narrated their stories and arguments in a more complete fashion. The choice evidences Malick’s interest in creating a partnership between the film and the viewer in creating meaning in order evince a deeper experience of the films’ pleasures and central themes. Malick’s intention for the viewing experience manifests in a more subjective use of style in his later films, where his earlier films were more presentational, with characters narrating the films more ambiguously, characteristically envisioning an audience apart from the film’s viewers.

While the primary tools that compose Malick’s aesthetic are voiceover narration and pictorialism, each film employs its own stylistic technique in tailoring its story’s presentation to reveal an underlying theme or to encourage a specific viewing experience. In *Badlands*, the extra-long shot scale motif constantly casts its characters’
interactions against the badlands’ landscape, replaces a shot-reverse-shot editing pattern with which to capture their dialogue, and consequently encourages viewers to appreciate the larger setting in which the characters’ story took place. In Days of Heaven, the film’s lighting design and camera movement stylistically illustrate the film’s definitions of heaven and hell on earth, and the use of point-of-view editing evinces viewers’ compassion for the characters rather than viewing any one character as responsible for the plot’s events. In The Thin Red Line, the use of an anonymous narrator that voices the shared thoughts of a whole military company stylistically evinces the notion of a shared human soul while also taking up this notion in its voiceover narration. The film furthermore features the most prominent appearance of pictorial shots, appearing in greater isolation from the main events of the plot in the film’s abstracted sequences, designed to attract viewers’ attention to the film’s central themes. Finally, The New World employs discontinuous editing to challenge viewers’ grasps of the film’s universe through the manipulation of space, time, and what the viewer can see onscreen. By disorienting the viewer’s understanding of the film’s universe, The New World suggests the presence of a layer of spiritual meaning that remains just beyond the viewer’s secure understanding.

Through the variety of narrative and stylistic techniques that they employ, Malick’s films intend to inspire viewers’ compassion toward the film’s characters, to attribute responsibility for the narrative’s events instead to larger forces, in the form of the film’s central argument. In doing so, the film encourages viewers to appreciate the presence of nature in which Malick’s films are steeped, and sometimes even to look
upon the natural world with great awe. Pretenders to Malick’s throne typically attempt to replicate this viewing experience through their imitation of Malick’s aesthetic. However, Malick’s films encourage a viewing experience that is inextricable from his deep conviction in his films’ thematic arguments, and their comprehensive effects, beyond merely its aesthetic, on the complete realization of his cinematic universe.

One final research question emerged when this project first began. The research sought an answer to the question, what is cinematic lyricism? When viewers invoke the term ‘lyrical’ to describe Malick’s films, what do they mean? The wide use of the word, with its yet unsubstantiated definition, mirrors the wide agreement upon Malick’s distinguished cinematic universe, with an incomplete body of literature that analyzes its terms. The initial evidence that surfaced from this research suggested that lyricism could be defined as follows:

- a) an expression of a character or characters’ inner condition, using b) distinctly cinematic tools for its visual or sonic illustration, in c) an ambiguous relationship to the main events of the narrative in order to d) engage the viewer in the construction of the shot or sequence’s meaning. Lyricism’s emotional impact but ambiguous function has the dual and conflicting effect upon viewers of bringing them close to characters’ emotions while also keeping them at bay from a simple reading or an understanding without nuance. Therein lies the resistance to definition; the conflict discourages viewers from articulating what they have seen and what they think it means.
But perhaps the definition of lyricism is not susceptible of such wide construction, in
Malick’s films if not universally. Having completed this research process, a more likely
definition for the lyrical quality in his films evolves from his use of pictorialism.

Pictorialism, as defined in the introduction of this project, comprises those shots in
which the composition illustrates meaning derived from a film’s narrative or themes.

Lyricism, therefore, perhaps more accurately describes those shots or sequences that
divide their thematic argument among a variety of cinematic cues from which the film
encourages viewers to assemble meaning. A lyrical shot suggests an argument or evokes
meaning through a combination of visual and aural cues, any one of which on its own
does not convey the shot’s full meaning, as perhaps a pictorial composition does.

Lyrical would define, therefore, the final sequence of *The Thin Red Line* and the
opening sequence of *The New World*, previously referred to inaccurately as pictorial
sequences. When *The Thin Red Line* encourages viewers to consider the presence of
God in the natural world through majestic compositions of nature, the voiceover
narration’s reverent tone, and a heavenly musical motif, the film encourages viewers to
construct meaning from cues that exceed the compositions’ design (although the
sequence concludes with pictorial shots). The same is true of the pictorial example
given in *Badlands* when Holly and Kit dance in the headlights of his car. Rather than
consider the shots as an assortment of cues, or an elaborate pictorial presentation, one
might more confidently refer to the technique as lyrical.

Terrence Malick’s convictions render his cinematic universe inimitable. He
constructs his films to evoke a profound belief that God’s presence can be felt in
nature’s beauty, and a deep concern that mankind’s power threatens the balance of life on earth. In doing so, Malick’s universe encourages viewers to access their own primal humanity, as his films display utmost faith that their audiences instinctively possess genuine compassion. Furthermore, Malick conveys unfaltering wonderment in the natural world, as definitive a feature of his films’ designed viewing experience thirty-five years ago as it is in his most recent work. His films encourage viewers to a similar appreciation, even if so minimally as Kit’s concise acknowledgment of his good fortune at sitting in beautiful place with, “The tree makes it nice,” (Badlands, segment 2).

Malick’s films evidence his belief that through compassion for the films’ characters and recognition of the natural world’s powers, viewers will come to value the balance between humankind and nature – a balance so meaningful that it can restore a person’s faith in God.
Appendix:
Supplemental Materials

Badlands (Terrence Malick, 1973)
Segmentation
93 min.

1. [Int. Holly’s bedroom, Ext. Fort Dupree residential area, Ext. Holly’s street, Ext. Holly’s house, Ext. Kit’s workplace, Int. Job Office, Ext. Downtown Fort Dupree. Kit, Holly, Holly’s Dad Kit’s Boss, Employment Officer. Holly, Kit, Garbage Man, Woody.] Holly sits on her bed scratching her dog. Her voiceover tells the story of her mother dying and her father moving them to Fort Dupree, South Dakota. “Little did I realize that what began in the alleys and back ways of this quiet town would end in the Badlands of Montana.” Kit and his co-workers collect garbage and make quaint small talk. Credits. Kit meets Holly outside her house and the two go for a walk. She warns Kit that her Dad would not like her to date a garbage man. When he asks, she tells her Dad Kit was just offering to do yard work. Kit gets fired and rehired as a cattle hand. He goes by Holly’s house as she says in voiceover, “He was handsomer than anybody I’d ever met. He looked just like James Dean.” They take a walk. 10 min. 6 sec. Cut to:

2. [Ext. Fort Dupree, Ext. Cattle Ranch, Ext. Holly’s House, Ext. Riverbank, Ext. Holly’s school. Kit, Kit’s co-workers, Holly, Holly’s Dad.] Over a sequence of Kit working at the ranch, Holly’s voiceover tells of how she and Kit fell in love, to her surprise. “I looked good to him, and whatever I did was OK. And if I didn’t have a lot to say well that was OK too.” Kit and Holly play cards. Over a sequence of Kit driving to Holly’s school, Holly’s voiceover explains how she had to keep Kit a secret from her father. Holly and Kit make-out under the bleachers. Over more footage of Kit at work and the two necking, Holly’s voiceover narrates how Kit pined for her when they were separated. “He wanted to die with me, and I dreamed of being lost forever in his arms.” She continues to narrate how the only thing she did wrong during this time was throw her fish away when it got sick, and how she could share this with Kit because he was strange. They make love unremarkably against a tree. As Kit sends off a balloon, Holly describes in voiceover how he filled it with tokens of their time together and a vow to stick by her. “His heart was filled with longing as he watched it drift off; something must have told him that we’d never live these days of happiness again, that they were gone forever.” Fade out. 5 min. 3 sec. Cut to:

3. [Ext. Holly’s Backyard, Ext. Fort Dupree, Ext. Field, Int. Holly’s house, Int. Recording booth, Int. Holly’s School, Int. Kit’s Car. Holly, Holly’s Dad, Kit.] Holly narrates as her Dad shoots her dog for having snuck around behind his back and forbids her to see Kit. Kit visits Holly’s Dad to tell him how he feels
about her, and her Dad tells Kit he never wants to see him again. When Holly’s Dad catches Kit in their house packing a bag for Holly, Kit shoots him in the stomach. He leaves a recording explaining that he and Holly killed themselves too, and burns the house down. Holly’s voiceover describes how Kit made her get her books so that she would not fall while they are on the run. “I sensed that my destiny now lay with Kit, for better or worse, and that it was better to spend a week with one who loved me for what I was then years of loneliness.” 16 min.

Dissolve to:

4. [Ext./Int. Treehouse Hideaway. Kit, Holly, Bounty Hunters.] Over a sequence of shots revealing the setting of the forest and materials Kit used to build the house, Holly narrates how they lived while hiding out in the forest. Holly thinks about the other ways her life could have turned out. A bounty hunter finds Kit trying to shoot a fish; when he tries to sneak up on Kit’s hideout, Kit shoots him and his three men. As they pack up to leave, Holly’s voiceover relays Kit’s lack of remorse for killing bounty hunters although he would have felt differently if they were lawmen. Xylophone score over the segment’s opening two minutes as well as Holly’s voiceover about loving the woods and the stereopticon. 9 min. 48 sec. Cut to:

5. [Ext./Int. Cato’s House. Kit, Holly, Cato, Jack, Jack’s Girl.] Holly’s voiceover narrates as they arrive at Cato’s house, an old friend of Kit’s from the garbage route. Over lunch, Cato tells Holly and Kit that his ploughboy found Spanish gold coins in the field. Leading them out to see the coins, Cato turns back to get his shovel. Kit instinctively shoots him in the belly when it seems he might have misled them. Kit and Holly talk to Cato about the junk in his house while he dies on his bed. “Is he upset?” “He didn’t say anything to me about it.” When Jack and his girl stop by, Kit leads them at gunpoint to a storm cellar. He locks them in, and shoots through the doors before he and Holly run away. Kit hides Cato’s body in a barn. Holly begins to regard Kit as “trigger-happy.” By himself Kit punches the air, visibly upset for the first time. Fade out. 11 min. 40 sec. Cut to:

6. [Ext. Badlands, Int./Ext. Mansion. Holly, Kit, Rich Man, Rich Man’s Maid.] Holly and Kit share small talk in the car. “At this moment I didn’t feel shame or fear, but just kind of blah.” Over sepia footage of men holding guns and children playing in their backyards, Holly’s voiceover mythically tells the story of the Midwest arming against them. “It was like the Russians had invaded.” Holly and Kit hold a rich man and his maid hostage in mansion for a few hours to restock on supplies. On a walk, Holly’s voiceover expresses her alienation from a world she is only just starting to appreciate. She talks to the rich man. “You think he’s crazy, eh?” “I don’t know, he’s kinda odd.” After someone stops by the house, Holly and Kit leave, locking the rich man and his maid in a closet and stealing the man’s Cadillac. 10 min. 21 sec. Cut to:

7. [Ext. Badlands, Int. Cadillac. Holly, Kit.] Holly reads aloud to Kit from a fan magazine as he drives. Holly narrates as they drive to the border of South Dakota. “We lived in utter loneliness, neither here nor there.” They watch a train go
by just to get close to civilization, and spin a bottle to determine which direction they should drive towards. Holly’s voiceover as they drive off at sunset tells a different story from the one onscreen, “He needed me now more than ever, but something had come between us…I spelled out entire sentences with my tongue on the roof of my mouth where nobody could read ‘em.” They dance to The Dream Has Ended in the headlights of the car on the side of the road. Holly’s voiceover forebodes that Kit knows the end is near. “He dreaded the idea of being shot down alone, he said, without a girl to scream out his name.” 10 min. 50 sec. Dissolve to:

8. [Ext. Badlands. Kit, Holly, Trucker, Helicopter Patrol, Gas Station Attendant, Patrol Cops.] In the middle of one of Kit’s hold-ups, a helicopter appears overhead and Holly admits she does not want to keep running. Kit shoots the co-pilot and escapes, while Holly turns herself in. Kit pulls over at a gas station where he is recognized by a patrol car, and he starts a car chase in the dust that he almost wins. He shoots his tire, builds a pile of rocks, and waits for the car to catch up with him. 9 min. 50 sec. Cut to:

9. [Int. Patrol Car, Int./Ext. Police Base. Kit, Patrol Cops, State Police, Holly.] Kit makes congratulatory conversation in the squad car before a cop asks him why he killed so many people. “Takes all kinds I guess.” The cop tells him he looks like James Dean. Fettered in chains, Kit makes fans among the cops guarding him at the police base. In handcuffs, he and Holly casually share their last conversation, and Kit acknowledges for the first time killing her father. He politely shakes hands with the police who arrested him before they escort him to the plane transporting him to solitary confinement. Holly’s voiceover delivers the epilogue, in which she gets acquitted and Kit gets the electric chair. 7 min. 33 sec.

0. End Credits.
Days of Heaven (Terrence Malick, 1978)
Segmentation
95 min.

00. Credits. Camera moves into and across black and white photographs that dissolve from one to the next. Each image depicts turn-of-the-century and/or tenement life. The last is a photograph of a young girl - Linda. 1 min. 53 sec. Dissolve to:

01. [Ext/Int. Factory, Int. Bill’s Apartment, Ext. Freight Train, Ext. Plantation. Abby, Bill, Linda, Overseer, Factory Workers, Foreman, Chuck, Linda’s Friend, Migrant Workers, Farmhands.] Abby searches through waste with other women looking for metals while Bill shovels coal inside the factory. He talks back to his overseer, and strikes him with a pipe when the fight becomes physical. Bill runs out of the factory as others look on gravely. Linda’s voiceover narrates how life used to be more fun with her brother. She wraps flower stems and Bill assures Abby of their livelihood. Bill, Abby and Linda hitch a train packed with migrant workers traveling southwest. Linda’s voiceover explains that Bill and Abby are traveling as brother and sister. Linda retells a story she heard from “some guy named Ding Dong,” illustrating the coming of the apocalypse. When the train stops, Bill acquires work as a sacker. A pan exposes Chuck’s land as it follows cars of hired hands towards the main house. The foreman warns the workers not to go near it. Bill surveys his new setting. Linda makes a friend. Farmhands relax. Bill, Abby and Linda play tag. Fade out. 7 min. 37 sec. Fade in:

02. [Ext. Wheat Fields, Ext. Main House. Chuck, Farmhands, Priest, Altar Boys, Linda, Bill, Abby, Foreman, Doctor.] Chuck and the farmhands attend a benediction in the wheat field. As Abby strenuously throws wheat bushels, Linda’s voiceover narration describes the onset of Chuck’s fascination with her. Among their habitual leisure activities around lunch break – Linda plays with babies, teases an older farmhand about his hat, plucks a chicken – Bill fights with another farmhand over a snide remark about his relationship with Abby. She and Bill laugh about it in private. As the season pushes on, Chuck begins to ask after Abby. The foreman unfairly cuts three dollars from Abby’s pay. Bill notices a cut on Abby’s hand as they are cleaning up so he steals a salve from Doctor he has seen around the house. He overhears a conversation in which the doctor tells Chuck he has only a year to live. Abby runs into Chuck lying in the field and the two talk for the first time. Linda’s voiceover describes how Chuck knew he was going to die. Bill and Linda cook a pheasant for dinner. The season is changing to winter. Bill tells Abby “it will only be awhile,” and then says they will go to New York to “get fixed up.” Fade out. 10 min. Fade in:

03. [Ext. Wheat Field, Ext. Pond, Int. Barn. Abby, Bill, Linda, Chuck, Farmhands, Accountant.] While Abby and Bill work tirelessly, tractors pass the by doing their jobs more efficiently. Linda’s voiceover describes their constant and
strenuous work. Chuck and his accountant review the high profits from the last season while Chuck focuses on Abby in the field. Linda’s voiceover describes Chuck’s kindness sympathetically. Chuck asks Abby to stay after the harvest. Abby and Bill discuss it in the pond, and Bill encourages her to accept. Bill tells Linda that if Abby wants to stay they will. The farmhands get paid. Linda comforts her friend whose boyfriend has left her. In Linda’s voiceover, she describes Bill’s dissatisfaction with his position in life and his desire to change it, after which Bill presses Abby on her decision. The workers celebrate joyously around a bonfire. Abby accepts Chuck’s offer to stay, on the condition that her “brother and sister” can stay also. Bill walks away after witnessing Abby and Chuck dancing together. The workers leave the next day at dawn; Linda and her friend share a loving farewell. Fade out. 13 min. Cut to:

04. [Int/Ext. Main House, Ext. Wheat Field, Ext. Barn, Ext. Forest, Int. Sleeping Quarters. Abby, Bill, Linda, Chuck, Foreman, Priest, Wedding Guests.] Post-harvest life begins for Abby, Bill and Linda. In voiceover, Linda starts to think about the future. She asks Abby why she’s playing along with Chuck, and Abby relays the wretched poverty of her childhood. The foreman inquires into Linda’s family’s background. Bill and Abby share intimate moments in the wheat field. The foreman appears displeased as Chuck grows closer to Abby’s family. Bill tells Chuck about the mill. While spending an afternoon in the woods, Chuck tells Abby he loves her. Bill and Abby discuss the implications of her marrying Chuck. Chuck and Abby wed, and share their first night together. When Chuck and Abby leave for their honeymoon, Bill watches longingly after them, and surveys the inside of fine house in awe after they have left. 9 min. 2 sec. Dissolve to:

05. [Ext./Int. Main House, Ext. Forest, Ext. Pond, Int. Bedroom, Int. Pagoda, Ext. Wheat Field, Int. Barn. Chuck, Bill, Linda, Abby, Foreman.] Bill and Abby honeymoon. When they return, all four play together in the pond where Abby and Bill used to go to be alone. In Linda’s voiceover she defends their plotline through her unfamiliarity with their leisurely lifestyle. Abby admires her fancy new clothes and house. Chuck and Abby share lunch with Linda and Bill, after which Chuck skeptically observes Bill and Abby taking a walk together. Bill enters Abby and Chuck’s room in the middle of the night and wakes her. The two run out to the middle of the wheat fields and spend the night together, sneaking back at dawn when Chuck is looking for Abby. Time passes, Chuck remains sick, Linda reads and plays alone. Bill starts to grow envious of what Chuck and Abby share. Chuck confronts his foreman about his dislike for Abby and Bill and, defending Abby, asks him to work at the North End till spring. Before he leaves, the Foreman warns Bill that Chuck is like a son to him. Abby’s guilt grows when Chuck expresses feeling like he does not know her. 10 min. 45 sec. Cut to:

Wilson visiting the Panhandle, and Chuck, Bill, Abby, and Linda go to see his train pass. Bill’s jealousy grows. Linda’s voice over describes Chuck’s stagnated illness. When Chuck and Bill go hunting, Bill hesitates on an attempt to shoot Chuck while he aims at fowl. Just as tension is about to come to a head, an Italian circus flies onto Chuck’s property. For the duration of their stay, Linda’s voice over describes how the devil is on the farm. One night while they are entertaining, Chuck catches Bill and Abby kissing in shadow. Abby deflects Chuck’s accusations about the intimacy between she and Bill. Abby asks Bill what he said to set off Chuck, and Bill deduces that she loves her husband. Bill leaves with the Italian Circus. Chuck, Abby and Linda live happily together as the seasons change. The foreman returns, as do the farmhands. 9 min. 47 sec. Dissolve:

07. [Ext. Railroad, Ext. Wheat Fields, Ext. Main House, Int. Barn, Ext. Roof, Int. Main House. Farmhands, Bill, Abby, Chuck, Linda, Foreman.] Bill returns, watching Abby longingly from outside the house before she, Linda and Chuck welcome him back. Bill tells her in private how he blames no one but himself. Once again, Chuck sees them kiss from afar and teems with anger. Slowly, each of Linda, Bill, Abby and the animals notice an infestation. The farmhands sound the alarm to smoke out the onset of a plague of locusts but the mob is no much for the insects. Chuck starts to attack Bill amidst the frenzy, causing his lantern to set fire to the wheat. He yells to let it burn. In an aside, Bill and Abby agree that Chuck knows about them. Chuck angrily runs inside to find Abby, gets his gun and ties her to the front of the house. He rides out into the fields, which have been burned to ashes, to find Bill. When Chuck charges him with a gun, Bill stabs him. He runs to collect Abby and Linda so the three can escape. The foreman finds Chuck dead. Fade out. 16 min. 9 sec. Cut to:

08. [Ext. Harbor, Ext. River, Ext. Riverbank Camps, Ext. Woods, Int./Ext. Boarding School, Ext. Town, Ext. Train Platform. Bill, Abby, Linda, Pawn Store Dealer, Vagabonds, Foreman, Search Team, Head Mistress, Students, Townspeople, Enlisted Soldiers, Linda’s Friend.] Bill pawns some of their expensive goods and sails away with Linda and Abby. Linda’s narration defends them saying that everyone is half devil and half angel. She tells of all the spooky things they see while they are on the run, and how Abby desperately wanted to live a better life than she had. The foreman searches for them. Bill wakes up one morning and sees that a search team has found their boat. When they catch sight of Bill, the police chase him through the forest and shoot him down in the riverbank. Abby cries over his body. Abby places Linda in a boarding school and the two part. Abby jumps a train transporting enlisted soldiers off to fight in WWI. Linda’s friend recognizes Abby and helps Linda to escape. The two go on a walk together with no particular plans, and in her voice over, Linda wishes her friend all the best. Fade out. 11 min. 35 sec.

0. End Credits.
1. [Ext. Utopian Village. Pvt. Witt, Pvt. Hoke, Young Girl, Older Woman, Woman, Villagers.] A sequence comprised of shots in the middle of the forest: an alligator, an intricate tree, the view through the canopy from the jungle floor. Over a sequence of villagers’ activities, namely children, a voiceover asks questions about nature’s power to do harm as well as good: What’s this war in the heart of nature? Witt recollects on his mother’s death with his friend, Hoke.

1.a. Flashback: Sequence of shots in which a young girl stands by an older woman’s bedside, the young girl’s heart beats, she hugs the older woman, some finches chirp in a birdcage, the ceiling is only sky.

Over another sequence of life in the village, Witt muses over immortality. A woman tells Witt she fears him because “he looks army.” Hoke sees an American patrol ship and tells Witt, both showing panic. Dramatic, atonal score gives way to voiceover. Musical score of villagers’ song precedes their rendition of the song, both introduced in this segment. 10 min. 36 sec. Cut to:


2.a. Int. Interrogation Room, Int. Holding Cell, Ext. Farm. Pvt. Witt, 1st Sgt. Welsh, Pvt. Hoke.] Welsh berates Witt for his going AWOL again, telling him that after six years in the army he ought to stop acting like a recruit. Welsh tells him that he saved Witt from a court-martial, and instead had him reassigned as a stretcher bearer. Witt claims he is more of a man than Welsh, and that he has seen a better world than this one. Welsh responds, “A man, himself, is nothin’…I might be the best friend you ever had, you don’t even know it.” Through their holding cells, Witt tells Hoke that he does not hate Welsh and never felt hated by him.

2.a.i. Flashback: A little boy, Witt, stands on a hay stack as the hay blows around his face.

Witt tells Hoke that he loves C-Company. 5 min. 5 sec. Cut to:

2.b. [Ext. Boat Deck. Lt. Col. Tall, Brig. Gen. Quintard, Soldiers.] Quintard lays out on a map the plan of action to intercept the Japanese. In voiceover, Tall describes his years spent tirelessly trying to please his superiors. Quintard talks to Tall and shares his admiration that Tall has not yet retired, and describes the army’s cutthroat competitiveness for rank. He orders Tall to “crush [the Japanese] without mercy.” Tall’s voiceover continues to ponder the things he and his family sacrificed for all of his years, concluding, “the closer to Caesar, the greater the fear.” 4 min. 26 sec. Cut to:

Mazzi blames the company’s luck on Captain Staros, Doll steals a shotgun, some like Fife just lie alone in fear. Bell tells a recruit about how he was demoted to the infantry for wanting to be closer to his wife.

2.c.i. **Flashback**: Shots at the magic hour on a boardwalk, Bell and his wife, who slowly touches his back. Bell’s narration begins, “Why should I be afraid to die? I belong to you.”

Bell’s narration to his wife continues as the alarm signals the company to gear up. Tall gives Staros his vote of confidence. The men board the boats preparing to attack the beach. 6 min. 30 sec. Cut to:

3. [Ext. Army Boats, Ext. Beach, Ext. Jungle, Int. Kitchen, Ext. Medic Camp. Sgt. McCron, Capt. Staros, 1st Lt. Band, Sgt. Storm, 1st Sgt. Welsh, Cpl. Peck, Scouts, Guide, C-Company.] Many men are stuffed into each boat that sails towards the beach. They wait in anticipation; McCron leads one boat in the Lord’s Prayer. When they arrive on the beach, there is no enemy fire. Two scouts from another company tell Staros it appears the Japanese deserted the beach about a week ago, prompting Band to ask, “What else don’t they know?” Storm leads his men inland through jungle and swamp. Bell’s voiceover begins once again, contemplating the larger powers that be.

3.a. **Flashback**: Bell touches and kisses his wife, her hair, her hands. Welsh leads his men through some tall grass where they uncover their first decimated American bodies. As they reach their medic camp, the reinforcements see the many wounded among the soldiers they are going to replace. As he tends to injured soldiers, Witt wonders in voiceover, “Maybe all men got one big soul.” 11 min. 11 sec. Dissolve to:

4. [Ext. Hill. Lt. Col. Tall, Capt. Staros, 2nd Lt. Whyte, Sgt. Keck, 1st Sgt. Welsh, Pvt. Sico, Pvt. Witt, Pvt. Icl Doll, Cpl. Queen, Pvt. Bell, Pvt. Dale, Pvt. Tella, Sgt. McCron, Pvt. Icl Beade, Cpl. Fife, Stretcher Bearers, Medic, C-Company.] In spite of Staros’ apprehension, Tall instructs him to lead his men up the front of the hill and denies Staros’ request for more water. Staros orders Whyte to scout the area ahead, and later prays by candlelight that he not betray his men. Tall orders an air attack, knowing between he and Staros that the air attack will not make a significant impact on the duty ahead of the men on the ground. Sgt. Keck orders the men to split up into groups of ten for the advance. He accuses Sico of not truly being sick, but Welsh allows Sico to retreat to the medics. In the leading group, Whyte and the two privates he sends in front of him perish immediately. The rest of the company meets a maelstrom of enemy fire. Witt asks Welsh to be readmitted to the infantry and Staros allows it. Tall asks Staros about emplacements via radio away from the violence; Staros listens in disbelief as his men die all around him. The fire lulls. Pvt. Doll kills a man. After Keck orders another advance, he misuses a grenade and blows it up on his own body with Witt and Doll to tend to him. When Sgt. McCron loses all 12 of his men he begins to lose his mind. As the men wonder how to quiet Tella screaming in pain in the middle of the shooting zone, Welsh bravely goes out to help him himself. Tall heartlessly gives Staros orders to attack the hill from the front in full force knowing
well that the Japanese have enough artillery to kill every man in Staros’ platoons. Staros twice refuses to accept the order, so Tall orders them to stay put. Staros watches as one of his youngest privates dies. 33min. 12 sec. Dissolve to:


5.a. [Ext. Hill, Int. Bedroom, Ext. Beach. Lt. Col. Tall, Capt. Staros, Cpl. Queen, Sgt. McCron, Sgt. Becker, Pvt. Bell, Bell’s Wife, Pvt. Witt, Capt. Gaff, Pvt. 1cl Doll.] By the time Tall reaches the holding point, the fire has died down and he proceeds with his order to take the ridge by nightfall. McCron edges further towards insanity. Becker orders Bell with six men to scout out the ridge. Bell goes the last leg on his own, throwing a grenade to decipher what artillery the Japanese have in their bunker.

5.a.i. Flashback: Bell remembers how it felt to touch his wife, taking her to the beach. The Japanese have five machine guns. Tall gives the platoon a pep talk upon Bell’s return. Bell is the first to volunteer for the group sent to take the bunker, followed by Witt, Doll, and Gaff who requests to lead the party. Tall tries to get through to Staros the importance of the campaign to the war and pushes him to accept that his men will lose their lives. 10 min. 31 sec. Cut to:


5.b.i. Flashback: Bell remembers making love to his wife, bathing her, as he narrates in voiceover, “One being, flow together ‘til I can’t tell you from me.”

The men try to sleep. Staros eats his ration, his voiceover saying only, “You’re my light. My Guide.” 4 min. 41 sec. Dissolve to:

6. [Ext. Hill. Lt. Col. Tall, Capt. Gaff, Pvt. Bell, Pvt. Witt, Pvt. 1cl Doll, 2nd Lt. Gore, Pvt. Dale, Cpl. Thorne, Cpl. Queen, Japanese Soldiers/Prisoners, C-Company.] Capt. Gaff leads his party to the top of the hill. They order an airdrop on the bunker before advancing closer. When they try to move once more, a machine gun opens on them and Gore gets shot. Japanese soldiers run toward their rock. Doll panics then runs to the closest rock to the bunker shooting with a handgun. The party faces a head on attack from the entire Japanese, but gets close enough to drop grenades into the bunkers. When they reach the summit, Gaff blows his whistle signal to the rest of the company that they have secured their position. The men react to the battle’s trauma: Queen beats up some Japanese prisoners, Doll and Bell comfort each other in tears. They guard their prisoners, who are in far more desperate condition than the Americans. 13 min. 15 sec. Cut to:

7. [Ext. Summit. Lt. Col. Tall, Capt. Gaff, Cpl. Fife, Sgt. Storm, Pvt. Bell, Dead Japanese soldier, Japanese Prisoners, C-Company.] The rest of the company meets Gaff’s party at the summit, Tall rejoicing at the victory. Tall shoots down Gaff’s recommendations for decorations and demands for water. He insists instead that the company continue pushing forward, making clear Tall’s self-interested inhumanity to Gaff. Tall makes a thinly veiled argument that he wants to take advantage of the company’s boosted spirit. Met be Gaff’s icy silence, Tall spills that
he has waited his whole life for this opportunity and Gaff would not understand how it feels to wait fifteen years for a war. Tall tells Gaff that he is like a son, and finally gives in sending three runners for water. As Bell looks at a dead solder, his voiceover asks, “Are you loved by all? Know that I was, too. Do you imagine your sufferings will be less because you loved goodness? Truth?” 6 min. 9 sec. Cut to:

8. [Ext. Summit, Ext. Jungle. Pvt. Train, Pvt. Dale, Japanese Soldiers, C-Company.] As Japanese soldiers stand ready for their attack, the men replenish their ammunition and proceed cautiously through the misty forest. The two sides attack with little visibility. The Americans storm the Japanese camp in a battle of chaos. As the men take prisoners, Train’s voiceover, “This great evil, where’d it come from? How’d it steal into the world?” In English, Dale describes to a Japanese soldier how he will die. Dale pulls the gold teeth from the dead Japanese soldiers’ mouths in front of their fellow men still living. In voiceover he says, “What are you to me? Nothin.” 9 min. 39 sec. Cut to:

9. [Ext. River, Ext. Utopian Village, Ext. Camp. Pvt. Bell, Lt. Col. Tall, Capt. Staros, 1st Sgt. Welsh, Villagers, C-Company.] The company rests and bathes. 9.a. Flashback: Witt remembers the village where he lived while he was AWOL. Tall relieves Staros of his command, replacing him with Band, for not being tough enough. Staros asks if Tall has ever had a man die in his arms, to which Tall responds, “Nature’s cruel, Staros.” Tall erroneously recommends him for the Silver Star and the Purple Heart. He says it is no good for Staros to stick around, and the quieter they keep his leaving the better it will be for everyone. While Tall whittles, Welsh reads aloud Tall’s statement to the men granting the battalion a week of rest off the line. The men burn down the remains of the Japanese camp. Fade out. 7 min. 6 sec. Cut to:

10. [Ext. Base Camp, Ext. Beach, Ext. Japanese Camp, Int. Bedroom, Ext. Pier, Ext. Garden, Int. Infirmary Tent, Ext. Barrack. Capt. Staros, Pvt. Witt, Pvt. 1cl Doll, Sgt. Becker, Pvt. Dale, Pvt. Bell, Sgt. Storm, 1st Sgt. Welsh, Cpl. Fife, C-Company.] The men return to the base camp for their week off. Staros says goodbye, and Doll thanks him for making the flanking move against Tall’s orders. Staros is glad to leave, and tells the men they have been like his sons. The company swims together, wrestles. In the rain, Dale weeps over the teeth he has stolen. 2:02:10. 10.a. Flashback: Dale remembers the Japanese soldier who cursed his stealing teeth. As he cries, Witt says in voiceover, “War don’t ennoble men, turns them into dogs.” In voiceover, Bell narrates a letter to his wife over a sequence that would resemble a flashback of her if Bell appeared in it. Storm laments the randomness of war’s victims. He feels numb to loss, Welsh envies his numbness. The men tame an alligator. Bell tells Fife he has not even looked at another woman since he joined the army. In a shot of his wife in her bedroom, there is faceless body in her bed. Bell gets a letter from his wife telling him she has fallen in love with someone else and asking for a divorce. 12 min. 20 sec. Cut to:

another native village but this one is impoverished and divided. In voiceover, Train asks, “How did we lose the good that was given us? Let it slip away, scattered, careless.”

11.a. **Flashback: A sequence from the utopian village Witt once visited.**

Walking back to the company, Witt encounters Ash left behind with an injury. Witt finds Welsh on a porch, asks him why he can be so cold. Welsh asks Witt how he can still believe in a beautiful light, and Witt says he still sees a spark in him. As Welsh watches over the men sleeping before the next day’s advance, Train’s voiceover describes the two ways a man could see a dying bird. 9 min. 36 sec. Dissolve to:

12. **[Ext. Stream. Pvt. Bell, 1st Lt. Band, Pvt. Weld, Cpl. Fife, Pvt. Coombs, Pvt. Witt, Japanese Soldiers, C-Company.]** Bell tells Band that they are sitting ducks and need to get out. Queen pulls rank by saying they just need to send a party to find out how close the Japanese are. He picks Fife and Coombs and Witt volunteers. The Japanese creep into the stream Fife, Coombs and Witt are scouting. On their way back to tell the lieutenant about the reinforced Japanese battalion, Coombs gets shot. Witt knows that one of them has to stay to fend off the Japanese while another goes back to warn the company, and he volunteers to stay. Witt quiets Coombs and leaves him behind while he runs away to divert the Japanese. They surround Witt in an open field and shoot him.

12.a. **Flashback: Witt swims with the children from the Utopian village.**

The men make a grave for Witt; Welsh tears up, “Where’s your spark now?” 13 min. 9 sec.

13. **[Ext. Camp, Ext. Shipdeck, Ext. Jungle. Capt. Bosche, 1st Sgt. Welsh, Pvt. Train, C-Company.]** As Bosche gives his inaugural speech to the company, Welsh’s voiceover angrily remarks on how everything is a lie. The men board their ship once again. Train tells another private that he knows the worst of his life will be over after the war. In his voiceover, he tries to find strength in his soul. Fade out. 8 min. 10 sec.

0. **End Credits.**

**The Thin Red Line, Segment 4: “Sgt. McCron in Battle,” 59:42-1:00:50**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Shot Number</th>
<th>Shot Duration</th>
<th>Shot Scale</th>
<th>Camera Angle</th>
<th>Camera Movement</th>
<th>Editing</th>
<th>Sound</th>
<th>Action</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>13 sec.</td>
<td>CU</td>
<td>Strait</td>
<td>Hand-held reframes with McCron's movement</td>
<td>Battle sound effects, McCron's quick breaths, atonal string note enters midway</td>
<td>McCron is crouched, trembling</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>7 sec.</td>
<td>MLS</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>Tilt up with soldiers' movement</td>
<td>Slow-motion, POV shot</td>
<td>Atonal sound effect intensifies, battle sound effects fade out</td>
<td>Soldiers run up the hill toward explosions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>13 sec.</td>
<td>MS</td>
<td>Slight Low</td>
<td>Slight reframes left and right with McCron</td>
<td>Cut to new camera position, discontinuity from end of 2 to opening of 3</td>
<td>Atonal sound effect grows quieter, Staros' sound effects moving through grass, panting</td>
<td>Staros runs past McCron, pausing to check on him, but McCron wards him off</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>12 sec.</td>
<td>MLS</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>Hand-held forward movement and slight tilts up and down through grass, tilt down into dirt</td>
<td>Slow-motion, POV shot, brief fade to black</td>
<td>Atonal sound effect intensifies, other sound effects includes McCron's panting breath, explosions in background, distant yells</td>
<td>McCron moves forward through the grass as men run forward in front of him, his head falls to the ground</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>23 sec.</td>
<td>MS</td>
<td>Straight</td>
<td>Jerky hand-held reframes with McCron's trembling</td>
<td>Reverse eye-line match, discontinuity from end of 4 to opening of 5</td>
<td>Atonal sound effect grows quieter, McCron's quick breaths, clinking dog tags</td>
<td>McCron crouches in the grass, trying to get a grip while clenching his dog tags</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The New World (Terrence Malick, 2005)
Segmentation
135 min.

0. [Ext. Forest. Pocahontas.] Over a shot of moving water, Pocahontas says in voiceover, “Come spirit, help us sing this story of our land. You are our mother. We, your field of corn. We rise from out of the soul of you.” Credit Sequence over images of an expanding map and the John White drawings. Fade out. 3 min. 22 sec. Cut to:

1. [Ext. Forest, Ext. Ship, Int. Holding Cell. Pocahontas, John Smith, Captain Newport, Selway, Tomocomo, Colonists, Tribesmen.] As ships arrive to shore, a supertitle reads: “Virginia 1607.” Pocahontas and her tribesmen see British ships arriving to their land. Captain Newport pardons John Smith from his hanging. Newport announces that they will remain where they have landed, and warns not to offend “the naturals.” The colonists and the tribesmen meet and examine one another. Smith’s voiceover begins, “The savages often visit us kindly, timidly, like a pack of deer.” Smith sees Pocahontas for the first time through the grass. Fade out. 10 min. 43 sec. Cut to:

2. [Int. Fort, Ext. Forest, Ext. River, Ext. Powhatan’s Village, Int. Powhatan’s Hut. Selway, Captain Newport, Captain Argall, Tomocomo, John Smith, Powhatan, Pocahontas, Colonists, Tribesmen.] The colonists’ stores rot or are stolen and relations between the colonists and tribesmen turn hostile. A colonist shoots a tribesman so John Smith punishes him in front of the other tribesmen as an example. Captain Newport returns to England, leaving Wingfield in charge, and sends Smith to meet Powhatan. As Smith travels to Powhatan’s tribe, his voiceover speaks to a voice inside of him, and praises the virtue of future life in the new world: “Here the blessings of the earth are bestowed upon all.” Smith loses his way on his own, and the tribesmen attack him. The tribesmen bring him back to Powhatan for judgment. Smith tries to communicate with him but fails. They decide to kill him. Cut to black. 11 min. 40 sec. Cut to:

3. [Int. Powhatan’s Hut, Ext. Powhatan’s Village. John Smith, Powhatan, Pocahontas, Tribesmen.] In voiceover, John Smith explains how Pocahontas saved his life by throwing herself on his body. As the women perform a healing ceremony on Smith, the tribesmen debate with Powhatan how to deal with the colonists. Powhatan decides that Smith will be a good teacher for his daughter, and that they will drive the colonists out if they do not leave by the spring. Smith teaches Pocahontas some English and learns the village’s way of life. In voiceover, he describes Pocahontas’ beauty, “so exceedingly so that the sun himself, though he saw her often, was surprised whenever she came out into his presence,” her father’s favor, her wit and spirit. Smith’s voiceover goes on to describe the tribe’s virtues, “The have no jealousy, no sense of possession. Real, what I thought a dream.” Powhatan urges Pocahontas to put her people before her own heart. As Smith and Pocahontas fall in love, in voiceover Smith says, “There is only this. All else is unreal.” Pocahontas speaks to Mother Earth in voiceover, and about
Smith, “Afraid of myself. A god he seems to me. What else is life but being near you?” Smith’s voiceover tells how Powhatan releases him, and the tribesmen lead him blindfolded back to his fort. Cut to black. 16 min. 27 sec. Cut to:

4. [Ext/Int. Fort, Ext. Forest. Tribesmen, John Smith, Lewes, Wingfield, Captain Argall, Children, Colonists, Pocahontas, Rupwew.] When John Smith returns to the English fort, he finds it ravaged by disease and starvation. Wingfield, now president, accuses Smith of having missed his trial for desertion. As Wingfield raises his gun to shoot Smith, Argall shoots Wingfield, to the group’s satisfaction. They bestow the medal upon Smith to lead them. Smith disdains the colonists’ miserable lifestyle, ordering them to work towards improving their fort, still aching for Pocahontas and their life together in the woods: “Tell her what? It was a dream. Now I am awake...To go back up that river, to love her in the wild...” As conditions reach their worst in the heart of winter, Pocahontas and her tribesmen bring the colonists food and goods. She asks Smith why he has stayed away from her, and he cautions her not to trust him. As she leaves, she asks in voiceover, “Who are you, whom I love?” In the spring, Smith goes back to Powhatan’s village to trade. He and Pocahontas briefly have time to love one another freely again. Their voiceovers overlap as though speaking to one another, “My true light,” “Can love lie?” “My America.” Smith’s voiceover longs for the chance to leave his fort behind, “That fort is not the world...Exchange this false life for a true one. Give up the name of Smith.” Pocahontas watches as Smith’s boat fades on the horizon. 17 min. 5 sec. Cut to:

5. [Ext. Fort, Ext. Powhatan’s Village, Ext. Forest, Int. Fort, Ext. Powhatan’s Brother’s Village, Int. Pocahontas’ Hut. Tribesmen, Powhatan, Pocahontas, John Smith, Lewes, Wingfield, Eddie, Chief’s brother, Emery.] Powhatan’s tribesmen find the colonists’ crops, and Powhatan confronts Pocahontas as to who gave the colonists the seeds to plant. As the tribe readies for battle, Pocahontas runs to warn John Smith and each tries to convince the other to desert their people. Powhatan’s tribe attacks, and the colonists are prepared. The two sides battle, while some of her tribesmen seize Pocahontas to return her to her father’s village. The colonists fire unprovoked during a standstill in the battle and it intensifies. As the battle rages into the fort, Smith prays in voiceover. Ultimately, the tribesmen’s superior skills in battle are no match to the colonists’ artillery. For her betrayal, Powhatan banishes and disowns Pocahontas when he cannot give her over to die. Lewes informs Smith that Powhatan’s brother, for the price of a kettle, has offered to trade Pocahontas to the colonists’ as protection from future attacks but Smith refuses to keep her as a hostage. Argall declares that Smith’s refusal is due to his plan to marry Pocahontas to become King of Virginia, and strips Smith of his command. Wingfield submits Smith to lashes and hard labor for his disrespect. As Eddie taunts and lashes him, Pocahontas’ voiceover speaks softly, “Come near me. You touch me now. In all things, may I stand by you.” Wingfield trades the kettle for Pocahontas, who prays to an Earth Mother for strength. She enters the fort in fear and confusion. 10 min. 43 sec. Cut to:
6. [Ext. River, Int./Ext. Fort. Tribesmen, Powhatan, Pocahontas, Colonists, John Smith, Captain Newport, Wingfield, Emery, Mary.] John Smith’s voiceover narrates that the firing canons on the ships’ return caused Powhatan’s tribe to sue for peace. Pocahontas finally finds Smith working in a field. He regrets the disaster they have caused, she only makes advances towards him. As they sneak into the forest to be alone together, Pocahontas’ voiceover asks, “What is right?...Wrong, who is this man? Now all is perfect, let me be lost...Come, follow me.” Captain Newport restores Smith’s stature, and tells him of the King’s request that Smith continue the expedition to find a passage to the Indies. The colonists arrange for Mary to “look after” Pocahontas, cleaning and dressing her as the women in England do. Newport addresses the colonists, inspiring them to go forth and create a new world in this land. As Smith inspects Pocahontas’ new attire, she says things to him in voiceover she cannot say aloud, “Am I as you like?” He tells her he has never been the man she sees in him, but she moves on unfazed and tells him she belongs to him. Alone, the pressure to leave her for the expedition tortures Smith. Cut to black. 11 min. 27 sec. Cut to:

7. [Ext./Int. Fort, Ext. Powhatan’s Village, Ext. Forest, Int. Church, Ext. Farmhouse, Ext. Shore. John Smith, Selway, Pocahontas, Colonists, Mary, Powhatan, Tribesmen, John Rolfe, Captain Newport, Thomas.] John Smith instructs Selway to wait two months, and then tell Pocahontas that he has drowned. Smith’s ship sails while Pocahontas is asleep and she wails as the boats inch into the distance. Mary teaches her how to read and write, encouraging Pocahontas to forget about Smith. Selway tells her that Smith loved her very much but that he has drowned. Pocahontas wanders the fort in grief, saying in voiceover, “You have gone away with my life. Killed the God in me.” The colonists burn Powhatan’s village. John Rolfe sees Pocahontas mourning, narrating his perspective in voiceover: “She was regarded as someone finished, broken, lost.” Rolfe takes an interest in her. The colonists baptize Pocahontas as Rebecca. Rolfe’s voiceover narrates Rebecca’s acceptance to leave the fort to work in the fields with him, and how losing his own family helps him to understand her pain. They spend days together in silence: “Who are you? What do you dream of?...I touched her long ago, without knowing her name.” When they grow closer, Rolfe proposes, hoping that she will grow to love him one day. They marry. As her married life begins, in a sequence of she and John Rolfe working the land and keeping house, Pocahontas grapples with her feelings in a voiceover to an Earth Mother, “He shelters me. I lie in his shade. Can I ignore my heart? What is from you and what is not?” They have a son, and he grows to be child. Rolfe tells Pocahontas that the King and Queen have invited them to England to honor Pocahontas with a royal audience. Pocahontas overhears that Smith is still alive and back in London. She resists showing Rolfe affection, explaining “it would mean something I do not feel,” that Smith is still alive and that she is married to him. Cut to black. 21 min. 3 sec. Cut to:
8. [Ext./Int. Ship, Ext. London, Int. Royal Court, Int./Ext. Manor. Pocahontas, John Role, Tribesmen, Sailors, Mary, Thomas, Londoners, Court Attendants.] As John Rolfe and Pocahontas board the ship, Rolfe’s voiceover address her, “Love made the bond. Love can break it too. There is that in her I shall not know.” A tribesman onboard tells Pocahontas that Powhatan sent him to count the Englishmen and find their God. Pocahontas fascinates Londoners and London fascinates her. A royal audience greets her. The tribesmen look in wonder at the land from the stained glass windows to the arboretum. Rolfe and Pocahontas remain silent towards one another until he sends for Smith knowing she will not be at peace until she sees him. Smith and Pocahontas walk the Manor grounds together alone. He tells her, “I thought it was a dream what we knew in the forest. It’s the only truth.” They part, Pocahontas happily returns to Rolfe, and asks her husband if they can go home. Pocahontas and her son play happily together in the garden, as she says in voiceover, “Mother, now I know where you live.” As they play, Rolfe’s voiceover reads his son a letter telling him how his mother died on their passage back to America. A tribesmen sits in an ornate chair in the manor, and runs wildly outside into the trees. Rolfe and his son return home alone. A sequence of trees and water running over rocks. Cut to black. 19 min. 21 sec.

0. End Credits.
Works Consulted


Henderson, Brian. "Tense, Mood and Voice in Film (Notes After Genette)." *Film Quarterly* 36 (1983): 4-17.


Orr, John, and Olga Taxidou, eds. *Post-War Cinema and Modernity: a Film Reader*.


<http://tvplex.go.com/buenavista/ebertandroeper/specials/bestof90s.html>.


