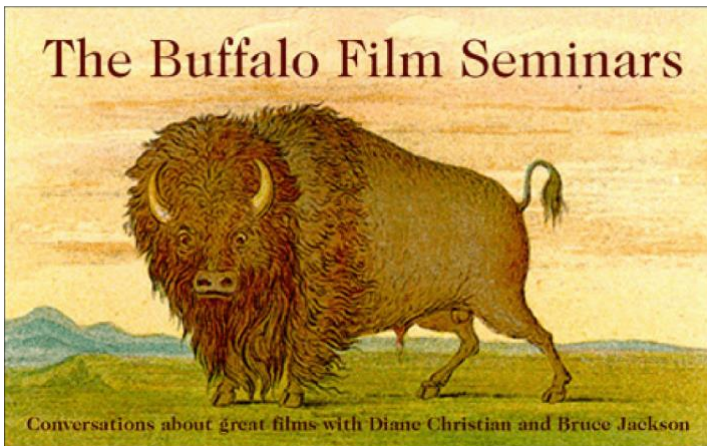


Virtual March 30, 2021 (42:9)

Terrence Malick: **DAYS OF HEAVEN** (1978, 94 min)

*Spelling and Style—use of italics, quotation marks or nothing at all for titles, e.g.—follows the form of the sources.  
Cast and crew name hyperlinks connect to the individuals' Wikipedia entries*



[Vimeo link for ALL of Bruce Jackson's and Diane Christian's film introductions and post-film discussions in the virtual BFS](#)

[Vimeo link for our introduction to \*Days of Heaven\*](#)

[Zoom link for all Spring 2021 BFS Tuesday 7:00 PM post-screening discussions:](#)

Meeting ID: 925 3527 4384 Passcode: 820766

**Written and Directed by** Terrence Malick  
**Produced by** Bert Schneider and Harold Schneider  
**Music** Ennio Morricone  
**Cinematography** Néstor Almendros and Haskell Wexler  
**Editing** Billy Weber

The film was nominated for Oscars for Best Sound, Best Costume Design, and Best Music, Original Score and won for Best Cinematography at the 1979 Academy Awards. Malick won Best Director and the film was nominated for the Palme d'Or at the 1979 Cannes Film Festival.

#### Cast

Richard Gere...Bill  
Brooke Adams...Abby  
Sam Shepard...The Farmer  
Linda Manz...Linda  
Robert Wilke...Farm Foreman  
Stuart Margolin...Mill Foreman  
Tim Scott...Harvest Hand  
Doug Kershaw...Fiddler



Richard Libertini...Vaudeville Leader

**TERRENCE MALICK** (b. Terrence Frederick Malick, November 30, 1943, Ottawa, Illinois) began his career as part of the New Hollywood film-making wave with the films *Badlands* (1973), about a murderous couple on the run in 1950s American Midwest, and *Days of Heaven* (1978), which detailed the love-triangle between two laborers and a wealthy farmer during the First World War, before a lengthy hiatus. He returned to directing after twenty years with *The Thin Red Line* (1998) for which he was nominated for an Academy Award for Best Director and was awarded the Golden Bear at the 49th Berlin International Film Festival, followed by *The New World* (2005) and *The Tree of Life* (2011) for which he also received an Academy Award nomination for Best Director and for Best Adapted Screenplay for the former film and received the Palme d'Or at the 64th Cannes Film Festival for

the second. Malick studied philosophy at Harvard and started a master's at Oxford, as a Rhodes Scholar, but after a disagreement with his advisor on the concept of world in Kierkegaard, Heidegger, and Wittgenstein, Malick left without a degree. In 1969, Northwestern University Press published Malick's translation of Heidegger's *Vom Wesen des Grundes* as *The Essence of Reasons*. After returning to the United States, Malick taught philosophy at MIT while freelancing as a journalist. He wrote articles for *Newsweek*, *The New Yorker*, and *Life*. Malick started his film career after earning an MFA from the AFI Conservatory in 1969, directing the short film *Lanton Mills*. At the AFI, he established contacts with people such as actor Jack Nicholson, longtime collaborator Jack Fisk, and agent Mike Medavoy, who procured for Malick freelance work revising scripts. He wrote early uncredited drafts of *Dirty Harry* (1971) and *Drive, He Said* (1971), and is credited with the screenplay for *Pocket Money* (1972). Malick was also co-writer of *The Gravy Train* (1974), under the pseudonym David Whitney. After one of his screenplays, *Deadhead Miles*, was made into what Paramount Pictures believed was an unreleasable film, Malick decided to direct his own scripts. He has directed 16 films: 2021 *The Way of the Wind* (post-production), 2019 *A Hidden Life*, 2018 *Filmed on Pixel 3* (Short), 2018 *Together* (Short), 2017 *Song to Song*, 2017 *Mon Guerlain: Notes of a Woman* (Short), 2016 *Voyage of Time: The IMAX Experience* (Documentary short), 2016 *Voyage of Time: Life's Journey* (Documentary), 2015 *Knight of Cups*, 2012 *To the Wonder*, 2011 *The Tree of Life*, 2005 *The New World*, 1998 *The Thin Red Line*, 1978 *Days of Heaven*, 1973 *Badlands*, and a short (student film at USC) 1969 *Lanton Mills*.

**BILLY WEBER** is an American film editor with several film credits dating from *Days of Heaven* (1978). One of Weber's first editing roles was as associate editor (as William Weber) on Terrence Malick's first feature as a director, *Badlands* (1973). Weber edited Malick's next film *Days of Heaven* (1978). When Malick returned to film directing twenty years later with *The Thin Red Line* (1998); he once again hired Weber to edit it, along with Leslie Jones and Saar Klein. While Weber did not edit Malick's next film *The New World*, he was an associate producer on the project. Most recently, Weber was one of five collaborating editors on

Malick's fifth feature, *The Tree of Life* (2011). Beyond this notable collaboration with Malick, Weber has edited *Beverly Hills Cop* (directed by Martin Brest, 1984) and *Midnight Run* (Brest, 1988). Weber was nominated for the Academy Award for Best Film Editing for *Top Gun* (1986); he was nominated again for an Academy Award for *The Thin Red Line*. *Days of Heaven* was listed as the 45th best-edited film of all time in a survey of the membership of the Motion Picture Editors Guild. He has also edited films such as: *Taxi Driver* (1976; assistant editor), 48 Hrs. (1982), Pee-wee's Big Adventure (1985), Days of Thunder (1990), Batman Returns (1992, second unit director), Grumpier Old Men (1995), Bulworth (1998), Jack Reacher: Never Go Back (2016), Rules Don't Apply (2016).



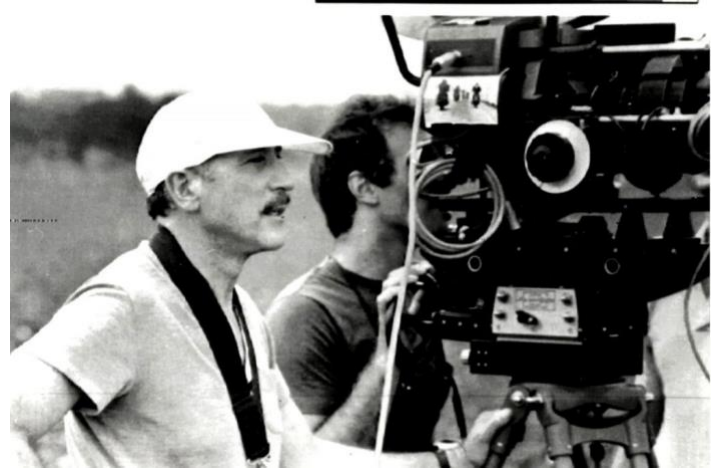
**ENNIO MORRICONE** (b. November 10, 1928, Rome—d. 6 July 2020, Rome, Italy) is perhaps the Susan Lucci of the Oscars, having been nominated six times for Best Original Score, yet never won until 2016, when he received an Oscar for *The Hateful Eight*. His other films include, *Malèna* (2000), *Bugsy* (1991), *The Untouchables* (1987) and *Once Upon a Time in America* (1984), *Days of Heaven* (1978). Contrary to Quentin Tarantino's claim at the Golden Globes this year that Morricone has never won an award for an additional film when he accepted the award on Morricone's behalf for *The Hateful Eight* (2015), the composer has won Golden Globes in the past. Specifically, he won for Best Original Score for *La leggenda del pianista sull'oceano* (1998) in 2000 and in 1987 for *The Mission* (1986). He was also nominated an additional four times. He has also won one Grammy for Best Album of Original Instrumental



Background Score Written for a Motion Picture or Television for his work on *The Untouchables* (1987) and been nominated three additional times. A tireless worker, Morricone has composed for over 527 films and TV series, some of which are *Voyage of Time* (Documentary, postproduction, 2016), *La corrispondenza* (2016), *Love Story* (2011), *Karol: A Man Who Became Pope* (TV Movie, 2006), *Ripley's Game* (2002), *Mission to Mars* (2000), *The Phantom of the Opera* (1998), *The Legend of 1900* (1998), *Bulworth* (1998), *Lolita* (1997), *Who Killed Pasolini?* (1995), *A Pure Formality* (1994), *In the Line of Fire* (1993), *Bugsy* (1991), *Hamlet* (1990), *State of Grace* (1990), *Casualties of War* (1989), *The Untouchables* (1987), *The Mission* (1986), *Red Sonja* (1985), *Once Upon a Time in America* (1984), *Sahara* (1983), *White Dog* (1982), *The Professional* (1981), *La cage aux folles II* (1980), *Luna* (1972), *Corleone* (1978), *La Cage aux Folles* (1978), *Days of Heaven* (1978), *Orca* (1977), *Exorcist II: The Heretic* (1977), *1900* (1976), *A Genius, Two Friends, and an Idiot* (1975), *Salò, or the 120 Days of Sodom* (1975), *The Devil Is a Woman* (1974), *My Name Is Nobody* (1973), *Bluebeard* (1972), *Duck, You Sucker* (1971), *'Tis Pity She's a Whore* (1971), *The Decameron* (1971), *Sacco & Vanzetti* (1971), *Two Mules for Sister Sara* (1970), *Investigation of a Citizen Above Suspicion* (1970), *Machine Gun McCain* (1969), *Once Upon a Time in the West* (1968, music composed by), *The Good, the Bad and the Ugly* (1966), *The Big Gundown* (1966), *Navajo Joe* (1966), *The Battle of Algiers* (1966), *For a Few Dollars More* (1965), *A Pistol for Ringo* (1965), *A Fistful of Dollars* (1964), *Eighteen in the Sun* (1962), *Crazy Desire* (1962), *The Fascist* (1961), *La signora delle camelie* (1992). For more on Morricone's incomparable contribution to film, see Dan Golding: ["Ennio Morricone and the Stuff of Cinema"](#) (*Senses of Cinema*). and Jeff Smith: ["The poet of dynamic immobility: Ennio Morricone"](#) (Bordwell's website on cinema)

**NÉSTOR ALMENDROS** (Néstor Almendros Cuyas, 30 October 1930, Barcelona, Spain—4 March 1992, New York) shot 56 films. He was the great eye of La Nouvelle Vague, the movement of French film-critics-turned-directors that dazzled the film world in the late 1950s and early 1960s: he did nine films each for François Truffaut and Eric Rohmer, two of the five original members of the movement (the other three

were Jean-Luc Godard, Claude Chabrol and Jacques Rivette; Agnès Varda and Louis Malle joined later). Some of his films were: *Billy Bathgate* (1991), *Heartburn* (1986), *Places in the Heart* (1984), *Vivement dimanche!/Confidentially Yours* (1983), *Pauline à la plage/Pauline at the Beach* (1983),



*Sophie's Choice* (1982), *Le Dernier métro/The Last Metro* (1980), *The Blue Lagoon* (1980), *Kramer vs. Kramer* (1979), *L'Homme qui aimait les femmes/The Man Who Loved Women* (1977), *L'Histoire d'Adèle H./The Story of Adele H* (1975), *L'Amour l'après-midi/Chloë in the Afternoon* (1972), *Le Genou de Claire/Claire's Knee* (1970), *Ma nuit chez Maud/My Night at Maud's* (1969), and *The Collector* (1967). He received Best Cinematography Oscar nominations for *Sophie's Choice*, *The Blue Lagoon* and *Kramer vs. Kramer*; he won for *Days of Heaven*.

**RICHARD GERE** (August 31, 1949, Philadelphia, PA) is an American actor who began in films in the 1970s, playing a supporting role in *Looking for Mr. Goodbar* (1977) and a starring role in *Days of Heaven* (1978). He came to prominence with his role in the film *American Gigolo* (1980), which established him as a leading man and a sex symbol. He went on to star in many well-received films, including *An Officer and a Gentleman* (1982), the 1983 remake of *Breathless*, *The Cotton Club* (1984), *King David* (1985), *Pretty Woman* (1990), *Sommersby* (1993), *Primal Fear* (1996), *Runaway Bride* (1999), *Dr. T & the Women* (2000), *Unfaithful* (2000), *Chicago* (2002), *I'm Not There* (2007), *Arbitrage* (2012) and *Norman: The Moderate Rise and Tragic Fall of a New York Fixer* (2016).

**BROOKE ADAMS** (February 8, 1949, New York, NY): After playing roles in television and low-budget films such as [Shock Waves](#),<sup>[5]</sup> Adams appeared in [Days of Heaven](#) (1978) and the remake of [Invasion of the Body Snatchers](#) (1978), for which she was nominated for the [Saturn Award for Best Actress](#). She has also starred in the films [Cuba](#) (1979), [The Dead Zone](#) (1983), [Key Exchange](#)<sup>[6]</sup> (1985) and [Gas Food Lodging](#) (1992), the latter earning her a nomination for the [Independent Spirit Award for Best Supporting Female](#). In 2002, she appeared in the romantic comedy *Made-Up*, which was written by her sister Lynne Adams, and directed by her husband Tony Shalhoub. Adams also appeared in the films *At Last* and [The Legend of Lucy Keyes](#) (both 2005), starred on Broadway in [The Cherry Orchard](#), [Lend Me a Tenor](#), Wendy Wasserstein's [The Heidi Chronicles](#) (1990), and guest-starred on five different episodes, in four different roles, of the series starring her husband, [Monk](#). [From Wikipedia.]

**SAM SHEPARD** (November 5, 1943, Fort Sheridan, IL--July 27, 2017, Midway, KY) was an American actor, playwright, author, screenwriter, and director whose career spanned half a century. He won ten Obie Awards for writing and directing, the most won by any writer or director. He wrote 58 plays as well as several books of short stories, essays, and memoirs. Shepard received the Pulitzer Prize for Drama in 1979 for his play *Buried Child* and was nominated for an Academy Award for Best Supporting Actor for his portrayal of pilot Chuck Yeager in the 1983 film *The Right Stuff*. He received the PEN/Laura Pels Theater Award as a master American dramatist in 2009. He acted in films such as: *Steel Magnolias* (1989), *Hamlet* (2000), *All the Pretty Horses* (2000), *Black*

*Hawk Down* (2001), *The Notebook* (2004), and posthumously in Martin Scorsese's *Rolling Thunder Revue: A Bob Dylan Story by Martin Scorsese* (2019).

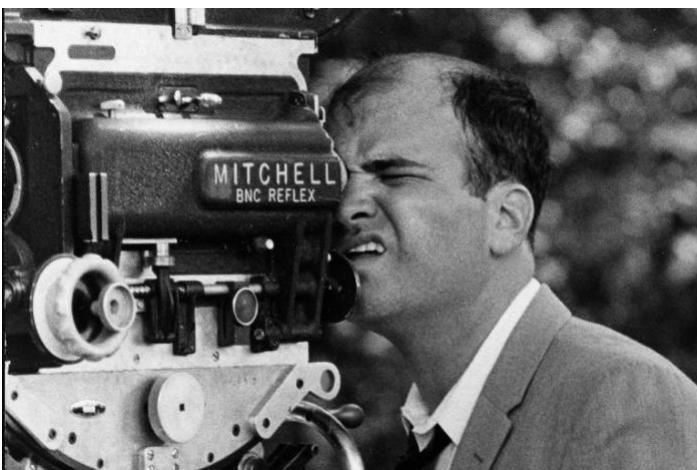
**Terrence Malick on Making *Days of Heaven***  
[The great online film site *Cinephilia and Beyond* [has a great posting on \*Days of Heaven\*](#). It includes video interviews with several of the principals, including this interview with Malick, one of the few he's ever given.]

In May 1979, Terrence Malick candidly explained the [origin of his ideas](#) for *Days of Heaven* and how he went about making it happen. This [interview](#) was originally published in French and is sourced from the book *Quinze Hommes Splendides* by Yvonne Baby.

It was in Austin, Texas that I had the idea for 'Days of Heaven.' I found myself alone for a summer in the town I had left when I was a high school student. There were those green, undulating hills, and the very beautiful Colorado river. The place is inspired. It is inspiring, and there the film came to me all together. I had not liked working at harvest time, I have a very good memory of it, of wheat, and the comings and goings in the fields, and of all the people I met. They were mostly petty criminals who were on their way to Phoenix, Arizona or Las Vegas for the rest of the year.

Like those of the film, these were not people of the soil, but urban dwellers who had abandoned their city, their factories. Rather than criminals, it would be fairer to say they lived on the margins of crime, fed by elusive hopes. At the time of the film, those who worked the seasons hated their jobs and the farmers did not trust them. They could not touch the machinery: if something was breaking, they had to signal by raising their hat on a stick. To distinguish themselves, they were always putting on their best clothes. I had noticed that myself when I was a teenager. To the farmers they were bringing—and this is still true—a piece of their homeland and of new horizons. And farmers sat down to listen—charmed—to hear the story of these workers. Already the farmers were almost nothing more than businessmen and they felt nostalgia for those days of yesteryear where they were themselves caretakers of their earthly riches.

Workers and farmers were embodying people whose hopes were being destroyed, some more than



others, by opulence or poverty. All were full of desires, dreams, and appetites, which I hope permeates the film. For these people, happiness comes and goes, they are fleeting moments. Why? They don't know, just as they don't know how to achieve happiness. If they see before them another season, another harvest, they feel unable to build a life.

Though this is familiar to a European, it may seem puzzling for Americans. Americans feel entitled to happiness, and once they manage to find it, they feel as if they own it. If they are deprived of it, they feel cheated. If they feel it has been taken away from them, they imagine they have been done wrong. This guilt I have felt from everyone I've known. It's a bit like a Dylan song: they have held the world in their hands and let it slip through their fingers.

As for the title, it is a feeling that a place exists that is within reach and where we will be safe. It is a place where a house will not rest on the sand, where you will not become crazier by fighting again and again against the impossible.

Linda, the teenage girl, is the heart of the film. She was a sort of street child we had discovered in a laundromat. For the role, she should have been younger, but as soon as I spoke to her, I found in her the maturity of a forty-year old woman. Non-judgmental and left to her own imagination, she had her own ideas [for the role] giving the impression of having actually lived this life instead of having to invent and play within another. At first it was a bit frustrating to work with her. She couldn't remember her lines, couldn't be interrupted, and was difficult to photograph. Despite this, I started to love her and I believed in her more than anything else. She transformed the role. I am glad that she's the narrator.

Her personality shines through the film's objectivity. Every time I gave her new lines, she interpreted it in her own way; when she refers to heaven and hell, she says that everyone is bursting into flames. It was her response to the film on the day when she saw the rushes. That comment was included

in the final version. Linda said so many things that I despaired being unable to keep them... I feel like I have not been able to grasp a fraction of who she really is.

With Néstor Almendros, we decided to film without any artificial light. It wasn't possible in the houses at night, but outside, we shot with natural light or with the fire. When the American team was saying, "This is not how we should proceed," Néstor Almendros, very courageously insisted. As we filmed,

the team discovered that it was technically easier, and I was able to capture absolute reality. That was my wish: to prevent the appearance of any technique, and that the photography was to be processed to be visually beautiful and to ensure this beauty existed within the world I was trying to show, suggesting that which was lost, or what we were now

losing because he is also a filmmaker, Néstor Almendros understood 'Days of Heaven' in every way.

I wanted the omnipresence of sound, so I used the Dolby system. Dolby purifies sound and is able to record multiple audio tracks (e.g. wind, the rustle of corn stalks, the pulse of crickets). I wanted to remove any distance from the public. It was my secret intention; to make the film experience more concrete, more direct. And, for the audience, I am tempted to say, experience it like a walk in the countryside. You'll probably be bored or have other things in mind, but perhaps you will be struck, suddenly, by a feeling, by an act, by a unique portrait of nature. That's what I wanted, that is how the Dolby and technological developments improved our work.

It would be difficult for me to make a film about contemporary America today. We live in such dark times and we have gradually lost our open spaces. We always had hope, the illusion that there was a place where we could live, where one could emigrate and go even further. Wilderness, this is the place where everything seems possible, where solidarity exists—and justice—where the virtues are somehow linked to this justice. In the region where I





grew up, everyone felt it in a very strong way. This sense of space disappearing, we nevertheless can find it in cinema, which will pass it on to us. There is so much to do: it's as if we were on the Mississippi Territory, in the eighteenth century. For an hour, or for two days, or longer, these films can enable small changes of heart, changes that mean the same thing: to live better and to love more. And even an old movie in poor and beaten condition can give us that. What else is there to ask for?

**Erik Benson: “The Not-So-Secret Life of Terrence Malick” (*Texas Monthly*, April 2017)**

J.D. Salinger fled the Manhattan literary scene for a hillside cottage in Cornish, New Hampshire, and was more or less never heard from again. Howard Hughes spent many of his waning years holed up in the penthouse of Las Vegas's Desert Inn, refusing public comment and shunning public appearances. Thomas Pynchon, America's most successfully private artist since Emily Dickinson, has managed to go six decades without having so much as a clear picture taken of him. But in the era of social media and digital surveillance, such seclusion is increasingly difficult to maintain, so these days, anyone can go to YouTube and watch Terrence Malick dance.

In the video, Malick—the 73-year-old director of *Badlands*, *The Thin Red Line*, *The Tree of Life*, and the forthcoming *Song to Song*—is at the Broken Spoke in Austin, the city he has called home for most of his life. The San Antonio-based band Two Tons of Steel is playing at full locomotive tilt on the honky-tonk's stage, and we watch as Malick—bearded, balding, and smiling softly—shuffles along in his best approximation of the two-step. Malick, who in high school was known as the Dancing Bear, more for his husky frame than his nimble feet, looks unaware that anyone is filming him. He is holding hands with his wife, Alexandra, who goes by Ecky, and together they slowly circle the dance floor. The video is mundane in nearly every way—twelve seconds of poorly lit, slightly jittery, low-resolution footage that shows an

older couple dancing happily but unremarkably. But within a day of surfacing, in late 2012, the video, “Terrence Dances,” was reposted and written about by the Huffington Post, Vulture, Slate, and IndieWire. To date, it has been watched more than 33,000 times.

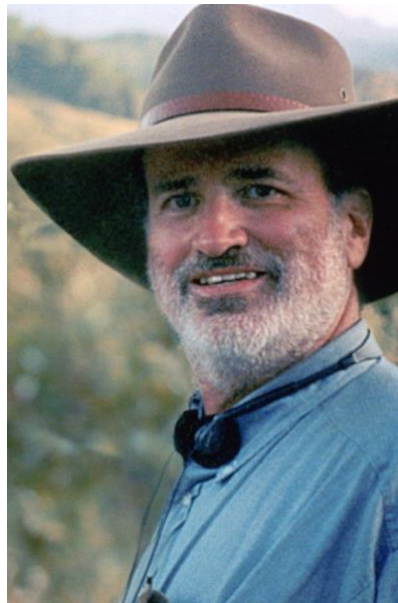
That a certain segment of the internet would be so hungry for even a fleeting glimpse of Malick is not surprising. The director is as famous for his closely guarded privacy as his output. He has not given an on-the-record interview in nearly four decades. From 1978, when Paramount released Malick's second film, the Panhandle-set *Days of Heaven*, until 1998, when his World War II epic, *The Thin Red Line*, premiered, Malick more or less vanished. Rumors circulated around Hollywood that he was living in a garage, that he was teaching philosophy at

the Sorbonne, that he was working as a hairdresser. Even as he returned to filmmaking, was nominated for Oscars, won the Cannes Film Festival's Palm d'Or, and doubled down on his experimental style (cinephiles will never stop debating his decision to punctuate a fifties Texas family drama with CGI dinosaurs in *The Tree of Life*), Malick continued to maintain his silence.

In Austin, though, Malick has always been a little less enigmatic. “If you work at Vulcan Video, if you went to high school with him, then he's Terry, he's not this reclusive guy,” director Richard Linklater, who first met Malick almost 25 years ago, told me. Still, Linklater said, “there's always a bit of mystery

with Terry. He's kind of everywhere and nowhere.”

Starting in September 2011, Malick seemed almost omnipresent around town, working on a new film that would be known for years only as Project V. At the city's major outdoor music festivals—Austin City Limits and Fun Fun Fun Fest—Malick could be seen darting through the crowds, a camera crew in tow, movie stars such as Christian Bale walking briskly beside him. His crew popped up at a Texas-Baylor football game, engaging in a stealth shoot until the giant scoreboard monitor captured Natalie Portman in the crowd. The director himself was spotted on the balcony of the Violet Crown Cinema, laughing with Ryan Gosling and Cate Blanchett. At



the Volstead Lounge, he drank tequila and ate tacos with his filmmaking team....

In his last published interview, in 1979, Malick gave a sense of how he saw his city back then. “It was in Austin that I had the idea for *Days of Heaven*,” he said to the Paris daily *Le Monde*. “I found myself alone for a summer in the town I had left as a high school student. There were those green, undulating hills, and this very beautiful river, the Colorado. The place is inspired and inspiring.”

...None of Malick’s peers—or, it would seem, Malick—had any inkling that he would stake out a career as a filmmaker, but he was already exploring many of the ideas that would animate his work. Students at St. Stephen’s went to chapel twice a day, and the spiritual education there was both rigorous and open-minded, with *The Catcher in the Rye* taught alongside more traditional religious texts in the school’s Christian ethics class. “It was religious in a broad humanities sense,” Lynch said, a conception that Malick embraced. “Terry doesn’t like anything sectarian or dogmatic,” Lynch added. “His grounding is more in a philosophical sense of wonder.”

Malick was also immersed in the arts. He was an active member of the drama club. He and Lynch would listen to classical music recordings in the dorm, then challenge each other to identify compositions from a few notes of a whistled melody. (Malick had a special affinity for Modest Mussorgsky’s *Pictures at an Exhibition* and Camille Saint-Saëns’s *Carnival of the Animals*.) Malick participated in off-campus outings led by an English teacher named Bob Pickett to see foreign films by the likes of Ingmar Bergman and François Truffaut at the University of Texas or at the old Varsity Theater, on the corner of Guadalupe and West Twenty-fourth streets. “We would go to Pickett’s apartment afterward and talk about the significance,” Romberg said. “Terry was very involved in that.”

...After Harvard and a Rhodes Scholarship at Oxford University, Malick began experimenting with more-white-collar careers. He worked for a short time

as a globe-trotting magazine journalist, interviewing Haitian dictator “Papa Doc” Duvalier and spending four months in Bolivia reporting for the *New Yorker* on the trial of the French philosopher Régis Debray, who had been accused of supporting Che Guevara and his Marxist revolutionary forces. (Malick never completed the piece.) Then there was a year as a philosophy lecturer at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, during which Malick concluded that he “didn’t have the sort of edge” required to be a good teacher. And finally, he moved to Hollywood, where



Terrence Malick in *Badlands*

he studied at the American Film Institute and quickly became an in-demand screenwriter, working on an early version of *Dirty Harry*, writing the script for the forgotten Paul Newman–Lee Marvin western *Pocket Money*, and making powerful friends like *Bonnie and Clyde* director Arthur

Penn and AFI founder George Stevens Jr.

But Malick wanted to make his own film, and he found a story he wanted to tell in the late-fifties murder spree of Charles Starkweather. Though Malick had never directed a feature, he insisted on total freedom and had few qualms about scrapping the production schedule when he became inspired to shoot a different scene or location, exasperating many in the crew. But when *Badlands*, starring Martin Sheen and Sissy Spacek, opened at the New York Film Festival in 1973, Malick became an instant sensation. The *New York Times* critic Vincent Canby called it a “cool, sometimes brilliant, always ferociously American film” and wrote that the 29-year-old Malick had “immense talent.” (The *Times* also reported that getting Malick to talk about *Badlands* was “about as easy as getting Garbo to gab.”)

Soon, Malick began production on his follow-up, *Days of Heaven*, a tragic love story starring Richard Gere, Sam Shepard, and Brooke Adams set in the North Texas wheat fields where Malick had worked after high school. *Badlands* hadn’t been an easy shoot, but on *Days of Heaven*, Malick’s unorthodox approach had the crew on the brink of

mutiny, and when the film finally came out, in 1978, the reviews were decidedly mixed, sometimes within the same review. “It is full of elegant and striking photography; and it is an intolerably artsy, artificial film,” wrote Harold C. Schonberg in the *New York Times*.

*Days of Heaven* won an Academy Award for best cinematography, and it is now widely regarded as a masterpiece. (Roger Ebert, delighting in the

stunning magic-hour photography and the poetic tone, would judge it “one of the most beautiful films ever made.”) But the experience of making the film had been so grueling for Malick that, according

to *Badlands* producer Ed Pressman, “he just didn’t want to direct anymore.” The year after *Days of Heaven* premiered, Malick abandoned production on his next project, a wildly ambitious movie called *Qasida* that he’d hoped would tell the story of the evolution of Earth and the cosmos, and informed friends and colleagues that he was relocating full-time to Paris.

In the final shot of *Days of Heaven*, two teenage girls walk down a railroad track, ambling toward an uncertain future. The “Aquarium” movement of Saint-Saëns’s *Carnival of the Animals*, the composition Malick loved as a student at St. Stephen’s, has been swelling in the background. One of the girls, the film’s streetwise narrator, begins to speak in a voice-over. “This girl, she didn’t know where she was going or what she was going to do,” the narrator says. “Maybe she’d meet up with a character. I was hoping things would work out for her.”

There is only one publicly available recording of Malick’s voice. Around halfway through *Badlands*, he makes the single on-screen cameo of his career, engaging in a brief, tense exchange with Kit Carruthers, the Charles Starkweather–like killer played by Martin Sheen.

Malick speaks in a slow, soft, higher-pitched drawl. He is unfailingly polite, a little retiring, and warm without being chummy. Malick has one of those voices that lends itself to imitation—broad and regional and distinctive—and when I spoke with his friends and colleagues, I heard several versions of it. They all sounded like the Malick we see in *Badlands*.

...Malick takes years to finish his films, hiring teams of editors to put together different cuts, and

finding and discarding entire story lines during the post-production process. In the final cut of *The Tree of Life*, Malick resolves the drama at the center of the film by having his young protagonist’s family move away from his boyhood home. There’s a bittersweet sense of a chapter

closing and an uncertain future lying ahead. But in an earlier, unreleased version of the film, the story of the protagonist, Jack, ends not with his family’s departure from Waco but on a more triumphant note: he arrives as a boarding student at St. Stephen’s. It doesn’t take a deep familiarity with Malick’s life story to see the parallels between the family in the film and Malick’s own. Jack bridles under the discipline of his stern, accomplished, and ultimately loving father. He worships his angelic mother. He and his two younger brothers turn to each other for support. The film is framed around the premature death of the middle brother. (Malick’s brother Larry took his own life as a young man.)

In the unused ending, Jack leaves behind his tumultuous relationship with his father and finds a new kind of family. We see him walk past St. Stephen’s limestone chapel, the highest point on campus, those “green, undulating hills” standing in the background. “Jack is just enraptured,” said Conway, who has seen the cut. “He’s having this intellectual and spiritual awakening. If you take Jack as in any way reflecting Terry, well, St. Stephen’s is where he found a community that he embraced and that embraced him.”





Malick's silence has always seemed, in part, a way to resist such a reading. When Lynch mentioned to Malick that he saw the director's last three features—*The Tree of Life*, *To the Wonder*, and *Knight of Cups*—as an “autobiographical trilogy,” Malick took umbrage. “He didn’t like me labeling them that way,” Lynch said. “He didn’t want people thinking that he was just making movies about himself. He was making movies about broader issues.” Malick might very well say the same of *Song to Song*, but nevertheless, it’s tempting to see his latest work as an extension of that discarded *Tree of Life* ending—the aging director offering a raucous love letter to the city that offered him inspiration as a boy and has sustained him ever since. ([Click here for the full article, which contains a lot of detail about Malick’s life and work in Austin.](#))



**Dennis McLellan and Jack Dolan: “Haskell Wexler dies at 93; two-time Oscar-winning cinematographer and lifelong activist” (LA Times, Dec. 27, 2015)**

Haskell Wexler, a two-time Academy Award-winning cinematographer — for “Who’s Afraid of Virginia Woolf?” and “Bound for Glory” — and the writer-director of the landmark 1969 film “Medium Cool,” died Sunday morning. He was 93.

Despite his success shooting big-budget films for major studios, Wexler, a lifelong liberal activist, devoted at least as much of his six-decade career to documentaries on war, politics and the plight of the disenfranchised.

“His real passion was much larger than just making movies,” said son Jeff Wexler a few hours after his father’s death at a hospital in Santa Monica. “His real passion was for human beings and justice and peace.”

At age 89, Wexler, camera in hand, was an early and regular visitor to the Occupy L.A. encampment at City Hall in 2011. He said he was drawn to both the cause of economic justice and the political theater, feeling a kinship with the protesters despite what he acknowledged was the comfortable lifestyle of a successful Hollywood cinematographer.

“You can take that insulation and figure you’re an old guy and you [already] did your thing,” Wexler said at the time. “Then something inside me gets reminded that my ‘thing’ is what makes me alive — to be able to have a camera and an idea and an urge that gives me pleasure.”

One of the few cinematographers to have received a star on the Hollywood Walk of Fame (in 1996), Wexler won his first Oscar for his black-and-white photography on “Who’s Afraid of Virginia Woolf?,” director Mike Nichols’ 1966 debut starring Elizabeth Taylor and Richard Burton.

His acceptance speech was among the briefest in Hollywood history: “I hope we can use our art for peace and for love. Thanks.”

He won his second Oscar for “Bound for Glory,” director Hal Ashby’s 1976 movie starring David Carradine as legendary singer-songwriter Woody Guthrie.

Wexler also received Oscar nominations for best cinematography for the 1975 film “One Flew Over the Cuckoo’s Nest” (shared with Bill Butler), “Matewan” (1987) and “Blaze” (1989).

Among Wexler’s other feature film credits as a cinematographer are “The Thomas Crown Affair,” “In the Heat of the Night,” “Coming Home,” “Colors” and “The Babe.”

He also was visual consultant on George Lucas’ 1973 classic “American Graffiti.” And he received an “additional photography” credit on Terrence Malick’s 1978 film “Days of Heaven,” for which cinematographer Nestor Almendros won an Oscar.

Wexler made his feature directorial debut with “Medium Cool,” a low-budget 1969 film that he wrote and for which he served as a producer and as the director of photography.

Described by Wexler as “a wedding between features and cinema verite,” the drama about an emotionally detached TV news cameraman was partly shot in Chicago during the tumultuous 1968 Democratic National Convention.

At one point, as the camera inches closer to a tear-gas cloud and a wall of police officers, a voice off-camera famously can be heard warning, “Look out, Haskell — it’s real!”

Considered “a seminal film of ‘60s independent cinema,” “Medium Cool” was selected for preservation in the National Film Registry in 2003.

Wexler also directed and wrote the 1985 feature film “Latino,” a war drama shot in Nicaragua that movie critic Michael Wilmington described as “an indictment of U.S. involvement in Nicaragua that pulls no philosophical punches and was made under conditions of real danger, near actual battle zones.”

Once named one of the 10 most influential cinematographers in movie history in a survey of International Cinematographers Guild members, Wexler became the first active cameraman to receive the American Society of Cinematographer’s Lifetime Achievement Award in 1993.

Describing his work in an interview that year with American Cinematographer magazine, Wexler said: “Movies are a voyeuristic experience. You have to make the audience feel like they are peeking through a keyhole. I think of myself as the audience. Then I use light, framing and motion to create a focal point.”

...Once described by Times film columnist Patrick Goldstein as “a fire-breathing old lefty with the crusty soul of a sensitive artist,” Wexler made a string of documentaries on subjects including the civil rights movement (“The Bus”), the Weather Underground (“Underground”) and the Vietnam War (“Introduction to the Enemy,” for which he traveled with Jane Fonda and Tom Hayden to North Vietnam).

“We have a responsibility to show the public the kinds of truths that they don’t see on the TV news or the Hollywood film,” he once said.

...In 2001, he received an Emmy nomination for outstanding cinematography for a miniseries or movie for “61,” the Billy Crystal-directed HBO film about New York Yankee sluggers Mickey Mantle’s and Roger Maris’ quest to break Babe Ruth’s single-season home run record.



**Rebecca Bengal: “Subvert Normality: The Streetwise Voice of Linda Manz” (Criterion Notes, 2020)**

*“Anyone with that kind of brilliance, you just give them space . . . She was a kind of unique, extraordinary, eccentric wild animal. And some jewels came out of her mouth.”*

Richard Gere

On Halloween 1978, a month after the release of Terrence Malick’s *Days of Heaven*, its youngest star, seventeen-year-old Linda Manz, snapped a plastic barrette in her hair and sat down with reporter Bobbie Wygant. In [archival footage](#), Wygant, the Barbara Walters of Dallas–Fort Worth’s Channel 5, hair sprayed and set in a dark cloud surrounding her face, introduces their brief segment, “From New York Street Kid to Hollywood Star.” She marvels at the unknown actor who was cast over Tatum O’Neal largely because—as Wygant sums it up—Manz possessed the same qualities as the character Malick had in mind: “a young, uneducated, rough-hewn child from unfortunate circumstances.” But did the actor *herself* know why she’d been cast? Wygant asks.

Manz simply rolls with all this, much as she had in the making of Malick’s film. “Well, they think I’m a natural,” she tells Wygant, her precociously husky New-York-tough accent instantly finding a swaggering rhythm. “I was born in the streets, I grew up in the streets, and I know everything that’s going on in the streets.” You can picture her climbing up on a Texas Panhandle-bound boxcar, falling into her own opening narration from the film: “We used to roam the streets, looking for adventuhs.”

“So you were part of the streets?” Wygant says.

“Well,” Manz pauses, like an improv actor buying valuable seconds of time. “*Kind of.*”



“You ever been busted?” Wygant ventures hopefully.

“Uh-uh. No. I always chicken outta those things. Like if the kids are gonna go rob something, I say, see you later.”

And if she wasn’t in the movies?

“Probably I’d be in the streets or in a grave,” Manz says, breaking into a big smile. “Probably be murdered by those kids.”

Vague and mythic, “the streets” and “those kids” nonetheless seemed to be exactly what Wygant wanted to hear. Perhaps she had taken notice of the scar skating down the bridge of Manz’s nose and the one just below her right eye, and imagined their origin stories. As they sign off, Manz still beaming, Wygant’s voice-over soberly intones: “While Hollywood has destroyed some young lives, it seems to be a salvation for Linda Manz, keeping her off the streets.”

It was easier perhaps, for Wygant, to paint Manz as a naïf—better for the story—but it was a story Manz participated in too. All her work is marked by an instinct for the truth that sometimes arises in embellishment, and in the visceral joyousness of invention. On the surface her upbringing wasn’t as rough as it was made out to be, but these tales got at the dark and deadpan truth that is at the heart of all of Manz’s performances. Malick claims to have discovered her in a laundromat. Perhaps he really did. Even from a young age, Manz seemed to inhabit multiple worlds. She was enrolled in drama and dance classes at Charlie Lowe’s Broadway Show Business School for Kids in Carnegie Hall and grew up on East Seventy-Eighth Street, between First and Second Avenues. Her mother worked as a cleaner in the Twin Towers of the World Trade Center.

“I was raised by my mother and my grandmother,” Manz told me when I called her in California in 2014 for a story that ran on *T* magazine’s website, tied to a screening of Dennis Hopper’s 1980 nihilistic punk film *Out of the Blue*. “My mother used to take me to the Metropolitan Museum of Art, she took me to Central Park, she took me ice skating at

Rockefeller Center, she took me to Radio City Music Hall for the Christmas shows and the Easter shows, and we probably had some of that good New York Chinese food!”

So much for lack of culture. I’ve since imagined a fantasy tour of the museum led by Manz

describing Goya and Rembrandt and Cassatt and Degas; Linda Manz on *The Death of Socrates* would have to be equal to what she did for *Days of Heaven*. Her voice, which I characterized in the story I wrote then as “cigarettes and asphalt,” in truth contains so much more: all the silt and dirt and the strange and joyous



and tragic grit of life.

On set, Malick would later confess, Manz had often eluded him. “I feel like I have not been able to grasp a fraction of who she really is,” he said in [a rare 1979 interview](#). But Malick’s instinctive way of working—the magic-hour shoots, his method of directing the crew to suddenly shift gears and film, say, a flock of birds passing overhead—was in so many ways not so different from Manz’s. She’d forget her lines, but she would also transform them, marvelously, revealing the surreal ironies within them just as Malick’s spur-of-the-moment noticings led to some spectacular cinematography. (“Every time I gave her new lines, she interpreted it in her own way,” Malick said. “[W]hen she refers to heaven and hell, she says that everyone is bursting into flames.”)

“Terry told me early on he wanted to make a silent film and I knew what he meant,” Sam Shepard says in an interview that accompanies Criterion’s edition of *Days of Heaven*. Shepard had been lured by Malick off his own ranch in northern California to play the part of the rich, brooding, dying farmer whose land Manz and Brooke Adams and Richard Gere’s migrant characters work. Not silent, perhaps—it’s hard to think of *Days* without the trains and the clanging and the labor and Ennio Morricone’s score—but largely wordless. It wasn’t working.

At an impasse two years into editing the film, Malick called in Manz and let her riff, recording as the film unspooled. He was drawing on a voice-over technique he had previously used in *Badlands*, which

features flat, diaristic narration from another precocious teenage girl.

Manz's narration, raw and direct and dreaming, supplied him with the story that was missing, its necessary humor, its fatalistic wizened edge. It pulls *Days of Heaven* down to earth but also hovers above it, floating in and out of the action, sometimes in the midst of it, often omniscient enough to glimpse the hidden dangers lurking on a sky-blue horizon, the fire behind the sunset, the ghosts that only a child can see. Malick regretted all he left on the cutting floor, but the result is a remarkable edit.

Transcribed, it amounts to less than twelve hundred words—a standalone oblique and haunted monologue that lies somewhere between the bloodshot verse of Arkansan poet Frank Stanford and the no-nonsense delivery of Mattie Ross, the young, hard-bitten heroine of Charles Portis's *True Grit*. Threaded into Malick's sublime skies and wheat fields, it becomes something else, intuiting the terror below those ecstatic surfaces. Manz knew the world and the people in it were torn ("You got half devil and half angel in you") and she ad-libs delightfully, inventing a guy named Ding-Dong whose Rapture vision she recounts: "The mountains are going to go up in big flames. The water's going to rise in flames. There's going to be creatures running every which way, some of them burnt, half their wings burnin'. People are going to be screamin' and howlin' for help." Her words lurk beneath idyllic footage of elk herds and clouds, but when the fires and locusts arrive, you start to wonder if maybe Ding-Dong is vindicated.

Sometimes the voice is pure hobo poetry, matched to Malick's Wyeth-esque lonesome houses and fields. "I got to like this farm," Manz says. "Do anything I want. Roll in the fields. Talk to the wheat patches. When I was sleeping, they'd talk to me. They'd go in my dreams."

"In all my movies I'm just being myself," she told me. "I just ad-libbed everything. With *Days of Heaven*, I came in and did all the voice-overs. I made all that stuff up. It wasn't hard, there wasn't any pressure. I was just having fun."

[Click here for the full text of Linda Manz's poetic narration.](#)



**Hillary Weston: "Out of Time: Sam Shepard in *Days of Heaven*" (Criterion Features, 2018)**

When playwright and actor Sam Shepard passed away last July at the age of seventy-three, his dear friend Patti Smith wrote a heart-wrenching remembrance of him for [the New Yorker](#). In it, she mentioned a pair of tattoos they got in the seventies: a lightning bolt on her knee, and a crescent moon resting between his thumb and forefinger. A few days after his passing, I found myself revisiting Terrence Malick's 1978 masterpiece *Days of Heaven*. About a quarter of the way, my breath was taken by a moment in which Shepard's character—an ailing, wealthy man simply referred to as "the farmer"—sits on a log in the woods with his soon-to-be wife, Abbey (Brooke Adams). He tells her he loves her, places his hand on hers, and there it is, thin as a wisp and gone in an instant, that sly crescent moon.

The uncanniness of that glimpse reflects the mystery and delicacy of his performance. The first time we see him on-screen, it's from afar. He's standing in front of his mansion, a stately Victorian house on a tawny, grain-covered hill overlooking his miles of land. Bathed in an incandescent afternoon glow, it's a scene reminiscent of Edward Hopper's *House by the Railroad* and Andrew Wyeth's *Christina's World*. Shepard's long, lean figure haunts the frame, and as the camera moves closer to him we see he's neatly dressed in slacks and suspenders, eating an apple. Still yards away, we hear its crunch. Standing on his porch, he's at a distance from the mass of workers descending on his fields, in an entirely different world.



Throughout the film, Shepard lingers somewhere outside of its center of gravity. Set at the turn of the twentieth century, *Days of Heaven* is primarily focused on the relationship between a Chicago steelworker named Bill (Richard Gere), who has accidentally killed his supervisor, and his girlfriend, Abbey. With his little sister Linda (Linda Manz), the couple flee to the Texas panhandle, where they find work in the wheat fields owned by Shepard's farmer, who, it turns out, is fatally ill. Soon, Abbey must choose between her beloved partner-in-crime and the new man who has given her a life she never dreamed of.

*"It's the way that Shepard manages to merge his natural charm and earthy sensuality with the character's ethereal nature that makes him so enchanting to watch."*

Malick's dialogue is sparse and the character is shy, so Shepard does much of his acting through facial expressions, which are so subtle they barely feel like acting. His penetrating gaze seems to look beyond the camera. Like a silent film star, he can speak volumes without as much as a word. From certain angles he almost resembles a hawk—perched above the world, curious, but reticent to fly down and engage with those living beneath him. When he does speak, we hear the innocence of his voice, the near childlike sweetness in his slight twang, all hard *r*'s and soft vowels—an idiosyncratic accent adopted from his upbringing in rural California and the Midwest. He speaks simply, clearly, with intent and earnest curiosity.

It's interesting that Shepard made his screen breakthrough as a man whose social status isolates him from the struggles that make everyone else human, considering the actor would later come to be known for his emotionally visceral, rough-tongued characters—a reputation that echoed his own tumultuous upbringing at the hands of a violent father, who was a bomber in World War II. After escaping his family home as a teenager, Shepard had delivered newspapers in his '51 Chevy before getting his ticket out of town when he joined the cast of a religious

touring theater troupe that eventually brought him to New York. It was there that he began to discover his voice as a writer, emerging as a major talent in the early sixties and bringing ferocity to the off-off-Broadway scene with his Obie Award-winning plays *La turista*, *The Tooth of Crime*, and *Icarus's Mother*.

By 1968 he'd worked with Michelangelo Antonioni on the script for *Zabriskie Point*, toured as



a drummer for the Holy Modal Rounders, married O-Lan Jones, and had his first child. After several productive years focused on writing, Shepard had moved his family to a horse-boarding ranch in Mill Valley, California, called the Flying Y. So when Malick first visited him in the mid-seventies,

acting was the furthest thing from his mind. Wanting him to play the part of the farmer, Malick met him out there, and Shepard was charmed by the director's shyness. The two talked for hours about the script without ever actually looking at it. It was the idea of finally having some money—and perhaps never having to apply for grants or write plays on commission—that ultimately spurred Shepard to head up to Alberta, Canada, and shoot the film. "There are these monumental turning points in a life that cannot be denied," Shepard later wrote in a letter to his friend Johnny Dark. "The decision to do *Days of Heaven* was one of those moments where the consequences (good and bad) keep ringing out until you die."

Shepard's character seems to exist out of time—until he falls in love with Abbey. When he meets her, it's as if he's never spoken to a woman before, and perhaps he hasn't, at least not with such intimacy and desire. Like many of Shepard's men, the farmer feels like a relic from an earlier age. But where his other characters are marked by a world-weary disillusion, the farmer is striking for his innocence. And it's the way that Shepard manages to merge his natural charm and earthy sensuality with the character's ethereal nature that makes him so enchanting to watch.

As a writer, Shepard had a longstanding interest in the tension between men and women, as well as the strained familial relationships that govern our lives. His plays are full of raw nerves and long-stifled emotions just beginning to burst at the seams. Whether in his writing or his acting, his characters are always physical and sometimes violent, and are frequently the creators of their own downfalls.

In *Days of Heaven*, it's love that turns to fire when the farmer realizes Abbey has deceived him. His jealousy becomes his fall from grace, breaking the spell of his early, quiet moments and turning him into something closer to the corrosive characters that came to define Shepard's career.

But even as his performance grows increasingly feverish, it's the tenderness of the farmer's first scene with Abbey that I keep returning to. It's a moment that happens by accident, with Abbey stumbling through the grass outside the Belvedere. He emerges from the ground, as if rising up from nature to greet her. When he asks her where she's from, there's a sense of longing and sincerity in his voice. The way he looks at her is charged with a lifetime's worth of desire suddenly awakened—"You make me feel like I've come back to life," he'll later confess. She tells him where she might be traveling after the harvest. "Do you think I'll like it?" she asks. He pauses, and for the first time we see him laugh.

Captured in this moment is something so tender and so tragic. From the beginning of the film we know that the farmer is going to die, that one way or another he will be gone by the time the credits role, yet standing there against that watercolor sky, he looks so alive you can almost hear his quickening heartbeat. Looking at his hand now, I cannot help but find myself momentarily removed from the film, thinking only of the man who lived outside of the frame. The tattoo appears as a remnant from a time before Shepard's mythos as an artist became bigger than himself. Here he is, just a man who rented a Ford Mustang and drove it from California up to Alberta, knowing his life would never be the same.



### **Roger Ebert: "Days of Heaven" (1997)**

Terrence Malick's "Days of Heaven" has been praised for its painterly images and evocative score, but criticized for its muted emotions: Although passions erupt in a deadly love triangle, all the feelings are somehow held at arm's length. This observation is true enough, if you think only about the actions of the adults in the story. But watching this

1978 film again recently, I was struck more than ever with the conviction that this is the story of a teenage girl, told by her, and its subject is the way that hope and cheer have been beaten down in her heart. We do not feel the full passion of the adults because it is not her passion: It is seen at a

distance, as a phenomenon, like the weather, or the plague of grasshoppers that signals the beginning of the end.

The film takes place during the years before World War I. Outside Chicago, Bill ([Richard Gere](#)) gets in a fight with a steel mill foreman and kills him. With his lover Abby ([Brooke Adams](#)) and his kid sister Linda ([Linda Manz](#)), he hops a train to Texas, where the harvest is in progress, and all three get jobs as laborers on the vast wheat field of a farmer ([Sam Shepard](#)). Bill tells everyone Abby is his sister, and gets in a fight with a field hand who suggests otherwise.

The farmer falls in love with Abby and asks her to stay after the harvest is over. Bill overhears a conversation between the farmer and a doctor, and learns that the farmer has perhaps a year to live. In a strategy familiar from "[Wings Of The Dove](#)," he suggests that Abby marry the farmer--and then, when he dies, he and Abby will at last have money enough to live happily. "He was tired of livin' like the rest of 'em, nosing around like a pig in a gutter," Linda confides on the soundtrack. But later she observes of the farmer: "Instead of getting sicker, he just stayed the same; the doctor must of give him some pills or something."

The farmer sees Bill and Abby in tender moments together, feels that is not the way a brother and sister should behave and challenges Bill. Bill



leaves, hitching a ride with an aerial circus that has descended out of the sky. Abby, the farmer and Linda live happily for a year, and then Bill returns at harvest time. All of the buried issues boil up to the surface again, against a backdrop of biblical misfortune: a plague of grasshoppers, fields in flame, murder, loss, exile.

"Days of Heaven" is above all one of the most beautiful films ever made. Malick's purpose is not to tell a story of melodrama, but one of loss. His tone is elegiac. He

evokes the loneliness and beauty of the limitless Texas prairie. In the first hour of the film there is scarcely a scene set indoors. The farm workers camp under the stars and work in the fields, and even the farmer is so besotted by the weather that he tinkers with wind instruments on the roof of his Gothic mansion.

The film places its humans in a large frame filled with natural details: the sky, rivers, fields, horses, pheasants, rabbits. Malick set many of its shots at the "golden hours" near dawn and dusk, when shadows are muted and the sky is all the same tone. These images are underlined by the famous score of [Ennio Morricone](#), who quotes Saint-Saens' "Carnival of the Animals." The music is wistful, filled with loss and regret: in mood, like "[The Godfather](#)" theme but not so lush and more remembered than experienced. Voices are often distant, and there is far-off thunder.

Against this backdrop, the story is told in a curious way. We do see key emotional moments between the three adult characters. (Bill advises Abby to take the farmer's offer. The farmer and Abby share moments together in which she realizes she is beginning to love him, and Bill and the farmer have their elliptical exchanges in which neither quite states the obvious.) But all of their words together, if summed up, do not equal the total of the words in the voiceover spoken so hauntingly by Linda Manz.

She was 16 when the film was made, playing younger, with a face that sometimes looks angular and plain, but at other times (especially in a shot where she is illuminated by firelight and surrounded by darkness) has a startling beauty. Her voice tells us

everything we need to know about her character (and is so particular and unusual that we almost think it tells us about the actress, too). It is flat, resigned, emotionless, with some kind of quirky Eastern accent.

The whole story is told by her. But

her words are not a narration so much as a parallel commentary, with asides and footnotes. We get the sense that she is speaking some years after the events have happened, trying to reconstruct these events that were seen through naïve eyes. She is there in almost the first words of the film ("My brother used to tell everyone they were brother and sister," a statement that is more complex than it seems). And still there in the last words of the film, as she walks down the tracks with her new "best friend." She is there after the others are gone. She is the teller of the tale.

This child, we gather, has survived in hard times. She has armored herself. She is not surprised by the worst. Her voice sounds utterly authentic; it seems beyond performance. I remember seeing the film for the first time and being blind-sided by the power of a couple of sentences she speaks near the end. The three of them are in a boat on a river. Things have not worked out well. The days of heaven are over. She says: "You could see people on the shore, but it was far off and you couldn't see what they were doing. They were probably calling for help or something--or they were trying to bury somebody or something."

That is the voice of the person who tells the story, and that is why "Days of Heaven" is correct to present its romantic triangle obliquely, as if seen through an emotional filter. Children know that adults can be seized with sudden passions for one another, but children are concerned primarily with how these



passions affect themselves: Am I more or less secure, more or less loved, because there has been this emotional realignment among the adults who form my world?

Since it was first released, "Days of Heaven" has gathered legends to itself. Malick, now 53, made "Badlands" with newcomers [Sissy Spacek](#) and [Martin Sheen](#) in 1973, made this film five years later and then disappeared from view. Because the film made such an impression, the fact of his disappearance took on mythic proportions. He was, one heard, living in Paris. Or San Francisco. Or Montana. Or Austin. He was dying. Or working on another film. Or on a novel, or a play. Right now Malick is back at work, with two projects, "The Thin Red Line" with [Sean Penn](#), and "The Moviegoer," with [Tim Robbins](#) and [Julia Roberts](#). Perhaps the mysteries will clear.

"Days of Heaven's" great photography has also generated a mystery. The credit for cinematography goes to the Cuban [Nestor Almendros](#), who won an

Oscar for the film; "Days of Heaven" established him in America, where he went on to great success. Then there is a small credit at the end: "Additional photography by [Haskell Wexler](#)." Wexler, too, is one of the greatest of all cinematographers. That credit has always rankled him, and he once sent me a letter in which he described sitting in a theater with a stopwatch to prove that more than half of the footage was shot by him. The reason he didn't get top billing is a story of personal and studio politics, but the fact remains that between them these two great cinematographers created a film whose look remains unmistakably in the memory.

What is the point of "Days of Heaven"--the payoff, the message? This is a movie made by a man who knew how something felt, and found a way to evoke it in us. That feeling is how a child feels when it lives precariously, and then is delivered into security and joy, and then has it all taken away again--and blinks away the tears and says it doesn't hurt.

### COMING UP IN BUFFALO FILM SEMINARS, SPRING 2021, SERIES 42

April 6 1981 Karel Reisz *The French Lieutenant's Woman*

April 13 1989 Spike Lee *Do The Right Thing*

April 20 1993 Jane Campion *The Piano*

April 27 2000 Joel and Ethan Coen *O Brother, Where Art Thou?*

May 4 1982 Ingmar Bergman *Fanny and Alexander*

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