A COLLECTIVE TEXT BY THE EDITORS OF *CAHIERS DU CINÉMA*

JOHN FORD'S YOUNG MR. LINCOLN

Lincoln is not the product of popular revolution: the banal game of universal suffrage, ignorant of the great historical tasks that must be achieved, has raised him to the top, him, a plebeian, a self-made man who rose from being a stone breaker to being the Senator for Illinois, a man lacking intellectual brilliance, without any greatness of character, with no exceptional value, because he is an average, well-meaning man. (Friedrich Engels and Karl Marx, Die Presse, *12-10-1862.)*

At one point in our interview. Mr. Ford was talking about a cut sequence from Young Mr. Lincoln: *and he described Lincoln as a shabby figure, riding into town on a mule, stopping to gaze at a theatre poster "This poor ape," he said, "wishing he had enough money to see Hamlet." Reading over the edited version of the interview it was one of the few things Ford asked me to change; he said he didn't much like "the idea of calling Mr Lincoln a poor ape." (Peter Bogdanovich,* John Ford, *Studio Vista, London, 1967.)*

Young Mr. Lincoln: American film by John Ford. *Script:* Lamar Trotti. *Photography:* Bert Glennon. *Music:* Alfred Newman. *Art director:* Richard Day, Mark Lee Kirk. *Set decorations:* Thomas Little. *Editor·* Walter Thompson. *Costume:* Royer *Sound assistant:* Robert Parrish. *Cast:* Henry Fonda (Abraham Lincoln), Alice Brady (Abigail Clay), Arleen Wheelan (Hannah Clay), Marjorie Weaver (Mary Todd), Eddie Collins (Efe Turner), Pauline Moore (Ann Rutledge), Ward Bond (J. Palmer Cass), Richard Cromwell (Matt Clay), Donald Meek (John Felder),

Judith Dickens (Carrie Sue), Eddie Quillan (Adam Clay), Spencer Charters (Judge Herbert A. Bell), Milburn Stone (Stephen A. Douglas), Cliff Clark (Sheriff Billings), Robert Lowery (juror), Charles Tannen (Ninian Edwards), Francis Ford (Sam Boone), Fred Kohler, Jr. (Scrub White), Kay Linaker (Mrs. Edwards), Russel Simpson (Woolridge), Charles Halton (Hawthorne), Clarence Wilson (Dr. Mason), Edwin Maxwell (John T. Stuart), Robert Homans (Mr Clay), Jack Kelly (Matt Clay boy), Dickie Jones (Adam Clay boy), Harry Tyler (barber), Louis Mason (clerk), Jack Pennick (Big Buck), Steven Randall (juror), Paul Burns, Frank Orth, George Chandler, Dave Morris, Dorothy Vaughan, Virginia Brissac, Elizabeth Jones. *Producer:* Kenneth Macgowan. *Executive producer·* Darryl F. Zanuck. *Production:* Cosmopolitan/Twentieth Century Fox, 1939. *Distribution:* Associated Cinemas. Length: 101mn.

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This text inaugurates a series of studies the need for which was indicated in the editorial of issue No. 218 [*Cahiers du Cinéma*]. We must now specify the objects and method of this work, and the origin of its necessity which has hitherto been merely affirmed.

1. Object: a certain number of "classic" films, which today are *readable* (and, therefore, anticipating our definition of method, we will designate this work as one of reading) insofar as we can distinguish the historicity of their inscription:* the relation of these films to the codes (social, cultural . . .) for which they are a site of intersection, and to other films, themselves held in an intertextual space; therefore, the relation of these films to the ideology which they convey, a particular

*This usage of inscription (*l'inscription*) refers to work done by Jacques Derrida on the concept of *écriture* in *Theorie d'ensemble* (Collection Tel Quel, 1968) which will be taken up in a future issue of *Screen*. *Cahiers'* point here is that all individual texts are part of and inscribe themselves into one historically determined "text" (*l'histoire textuelle*) within which they are produced; a reading of the individual text therefore requires examining both its dynamic relationship with this general text and the relationship between the general text and specific historical events.—Ed. *Screen*.

"phase" which they represent, and to the events (present, past, historical, mythical, fictional) which they aimed to represent.

For convenience we will retain the term "classic" (though obviously in the course of these studies we will have to examine, and perhaps even challenge it, in order finally to construct its theory). The term is convenient in that it roughly designates a cinema which has been described as based on analogical representation and linear narrative ("transparence" and "presence") and is therefore apparently completely held within the "system" which subtends and unifies these concepts. It has obviously been possible to consider the Hollywood cinema as a model of such "classicism" insofar as its reception has been totally dictated by this system—and limited to a kind of non-reading of the films assured by their apparent non-writing, which was seen as the very essence of their mastery.

2. Our work will therefore be a *reading* in the sense of a *re-scanning* of these films. That is, to define it negatively first: (a) it will not be (yet another) commentary. The function of the commentary is to distill an ideally constituted sense presented as the object's ultimate meaning (which however remains elusive indefinitely, given the infinite possibilities of talking about film): a wandering and prolific pseudo-reading which misses the reality of the inscription, and substitutes for it a discourse consisting of a simple ideological delineation of what appear(s) to be the main statement(s) of the film at a given moment.

(b) Nor will it be a new *interpretation*, i.e., the translation of what is supposed to be already in the film into a critical system (meta-language) where the interpreter has the kind of absolute knowledge of the exegetist blind to the (historical) ideological determination of his practice and his object-pretext, when he is not a hermeneute à la Viridiana slotting things into a pre-ordained structure.

(c) Nor will this be a dissection of an object conceived of as a closed structure, the cataloguing of progressively smaller and more "discrete" units: in other words, an inventory of the elements which ignores their predestination for the filmmaker's

writing project and, having added a portion of intelligibility to the initial object, claims to deconstruct, then reconstruct that object, without taking any account of the dynamic of the inscription. Not, therefore, a mechanistic structural reading.

(d) Nor finally will it be a demystification in the sense where it is enough to re-locate the film within its historical determinations, "reveal" its assumptions, declare its problematic and its aesthetic prejudices and criticise its statement in the name of a mechanically applied materialist knowledge, in order to see it collapse and feel no more needs to be said. This amounts to throwing the baby out with the bathwater without getting wet. To be more precise, it would be disposing of the film in a moralist way, with an argument which separates the "good" from the "bad," and evading any effective reading of it. (An effective reading can only be such by returning on its own deciphering operation and by integrating its functioning into the text it produces, which is something quite different from brandishing a method—even if it is Marxist-Leninist—and leaving it at that.)

It is worth recalling that the external and mechanistic application of possibly even rigorously constructed concepts has always tried to pass for the exercise of a theoretical practice: and—though this has long been established—that an artistic product cannot be linked to its socio-historical context according to a linear, expressive, direct causality (unless one falls into a reductionist historical determinism), but that it has a complex, mediated and *decentred* relationship with this context, which has to be rigorously specified (which is why it is simplistic to discard "classic" Hollywood cinema on the pretext that since it is part of the capitalist system it can only reflect it). Walter Benjamin has insisted strongly on the necessity to consider literary work (but similarly any art product) not as a reflection of the relations of production, but as having a place *within* these relations. (Obviously he was talking of progressive works, past, present, and to come: but a materialist reading of art products which appear to lack any intentional critical dimension concerning capitalist relations of production must do the same thing. We will return later at greater length to this basic notion of "the author as producer.") In this re-

spect we must once again quote Macherey's theses on literary production (in particular those concerning the Leninist corrections to Trotsky and Plekhanov's simplistic positions on Tolstoy) and Badiou's concerning the autonomy of the aesthetic process and the complex relation historical truth/ideologies/author (as place and not as "internalisation")/work.

And that, given this, denouncing ideological assumptions and ideological production, and designating them as falsification and error, has never sufficed to ensure that those who operated the critique themselves produced truth. Nor what's more has it sufficed to bring out the truth about the very things they are opposing. It is therefore absurd to demand that a film account for what it doesn't say about the positions and the knowledge which form the basis from which it is being questioned; and it is too easy (but of what use?) to "deconstruct" it in the name of this same knowledge (in this case, the science of historical materialism which has to be practised as an active method and not used as a guarantee). Lest we be accused of dishonesty, let us make it clear that the points made in paragraph (d) refer to the most extreme positions within *Cinethique*.

3. At this point we seem to have come up against a contradiction: we are not content to demand that a film justify itself vis à vis its context, and at the same time we refuse to look for "depth," to go from the "literal meaning" to some "secret meaning", we are not content with what it says (what it intends to say). This is only an apparent contradiction. What will be attempted here through a re-scansion of these films in a process of active reading, is to make them say what they have to say *within* what they leave unsaid, to reveal their constituent lacks; these are neither faults in the work (since these films, as Jean-Pierre Oudart has clearly demonstrated—see the preceding issue [No. 222]—are the work of extremely skilled filmmakers) nor a deception on the part of the author (for why should he practice deception?); they are *structuring absences*, always displaced—an overdetermination which is the only possible basis from which these discourses could be realised, the unsaid included in the said and necessary to its constitution. In short, to use Althusser's expression—"the internal shadows of exclusion."

The films we will be studying do not need filling out, they do not demand a teleological reading, nor do we require them to account for their *external* shadows (except purely and simply to dismiss them); all that is involved is traversing their statement to locate what sets it in place, to double their writing with an active reading to reveal what is already there, but silent, to make them say not only "what this says, but what it doesn't say because it doesn't want to say it" (J A. Miller, and we would add: what, while intending to leave unsaid, it is nevertheless obliged to say).

4. What is the use of such a work? We would be obliged if the reader didn't envisage this as a "Hollywood revisited." Anyone so tempted is advised to give up the reading with the very next paragraph. To the rest we say that the structuring absences mentioned above and the establishment of an ersatz which this dictates have some connection with the sexual *other scene*, and that "other scene" which is politics; that the double repression—politics and eroticism—which our reading will bring out (a repression which cannot be indicated once and for all and left at that but rather has to be written into the constantly renewed process of its repression) allows the answer to be deduced, and this is an answer whose very question would not have been possible without the two discourses of overdetermination, the Marxist and the Freudian. This is why we will not choose films for their value as "external masterpieces" but rather because the negatory force of their writing provides enough *scope* for a reading—because they can be re-written.

2. HOLLYWOOD IN 1938–39

One of the consequences of the 1929 economic crisis was that the major banking groups (Morgan, Rockefeller, DuPont, Hearst, General Motors, etc.) strengthened their grip on the Hollywood firms which were having problems (weakened by the talkies' "new patents war").

As early as 1935, the five Major Companies (Paramount, Warner, MGM, Fox, RKO) and the three Minor (Universal, Columbia, United Artists) were totally controlled by bankers and financiers, often directly linked to one company or another. Big Business's grip on Hollywood had already trans-

lated itself (aside from economic management and the ideological orientation of the American Cinema) into the regrouping of the eight companies in the MPPA (Motion Pictures Producers Association) and the creation of a central system of self-censorship (the Hays code—the American bank is known to be puritanical: the major shareholder of the Metropolitan in New York, Morgan, exercised a real censorship on its programmes).

It was precisely in 1935 that, under the aegis of the Chase National Bank, William Fox's Fox (founded in 1914) merged with Darryl F. Zanuck's 20th Century Productions, to form 20th Century Fox, where Zanuck became vice-president and took control.

During the same period, and mainly in 1937–38 the American cinemas suffered from a very serious drop in box-office receipts (this is first attributed to the consequences of the recession, then, with the situation getting worse, to lack of regeneration of Hollywood's stock of stars), the bank's boards, very worried, ordered a *maximum reduction in costs of production*. This national marketing crisis (in a field in which Hollywood films previously covered their entire costs, foreign sales being mainly a source of profits) was made even worse by the reduced income from foreign sales; this was due to the political situation in Europe, the gradual closure of the German and Italian markets to American films, and the currency blockade set up by these two countries.

3. THE USA IN 1938–39

In 1932, in the middle of the economic crisis, the Democrat Roosevelt became President, succeeding the Republican Hoover whose policies, both economic (favourable to the trusts, deflationist) and social (leaving local groups and charitable organisations to deal with unemployment: cf. *Mr. Deeds Goes to Town*, Capra) had been incapable of avoiding the crisis and also of suppressing its effects. Roosevelt's policies were the opposite; federal intervention in the whole country's economic and social life, States as private powers (New Deal); establishment of federal intervention and public works agencies,

impinging on the rights and areas previously reserved to State legislature and private companies (a controlled economy, social budget etc.): so many measures which encountered violent opposition from the Republicans and Big Business. In 1935 they succeeded. the Supreme Court declares Roosevelt's federal economic intervention agencies to be unconstitutional (because they interfere with the rights of the States). But Roosevelt's second victory in 1936 smashed these manoeuvres, and the Supreme Court, threatened with reform, ended up by recognising the New Deal's social policies and (among others) the right to unionise.

At the level of the structures of American society, the crisis and its remedies have caused the strengthening of the federal State and increased its control over the individual States and the Trust's policies: by its "conditional subsidies," its nationwide economic programmes, its social regulations, the federal government took control of vast areas which had previously depended only on the authority of the States and on the interests of free enterprise. In 1937, "the dualist" interpretation of the 10th amendment of the Constitution—which forbade any federal intervention in the economic and social policies of the States (their private domain)—was abrogated by the Supreme Court from its judgments. This strengthening of federal power at all levels had the effect of *increasing the President's power*.

But, as early as 1937, a new economic crisis emerged. economic activity dropped by 37% compared to 1929, the number of unemployed was again over 10 million in 1938, and despite the refloating of major public works, stayed at 9 million in 1939 (cf. *The Grapes of Wrath*). The war (arms industries becoming predominant in the economy) was to help end the new crisis by allowing full employment. . .

Federal centralism, isolationism, economic reorganisation (including Hollywood), strengthening of the Democrat-Republican opposition, new threats of internal and international crisis, crisis and restrictions in Hollywood itself; such is the fairly gloomy context of the *Young Mr. Lincoln* (1939) undertaking.

It is no doubt difficult, but necessary to attempt to estimate

the total and respective importance of these factors to the project and the ideological "message" of the film. In Hollywood, more than anywhere else the cinema is not "innocent." Creditor of the capitalist system, subject to its constraints, its crises, its contradictions, the American cinema, the main instrument of the ideological super-structure, is heavily determined at every level of its existence. As a product of the capitalist system and of its ideology, its role is in turn to reproduce the one and thereby to help the survival of the other Each film, however, is inserted into this circuit according to its specificity, and there has been no analysis if one is content to say that each Hollywood film confirms and spreads the ideology of American capitalism. it is the precise articulations (rarely the same from one film to the next) of the film and of the ideology which must be studied (see 1).

4. FOX AND ZANUCK

20th Century Fox (which produced *Young Mr. Lincoln*), because of its links with Big Business, also supports the Republican Party From its inception the Republican Party has been the party of the "Great Families." Associated with (and an instrument of) industrial development, it rapidly became the "party of Big Business" and follows its social and economic directives: protectionism to assist industry, anti-unionist struggle, moral reaction and racism (directed against immigrants and Blacks—whom the party had fleetingly championed in Lincoln's time: but it is common knowledge that this was due once again to economic reasons and to pressures from religious groups, groups which fifty years later, were to lead a campaign against everything that is "unamerican").

In power from 1928 to 1932 with Hoover as president, the Republican Party is financed by some of Hollywood's masters (Rockefeller, DuPont de Nemours, General Motors, etc.). At the elections in 1928, 87% of the people listed in *Who's Who in America* supported Hoover. He has put the underwriters of Capital at key posts in the administration: the Secretary to the Treasury is none other than Mellon, the richest man in the world (take an example of his policies: he brings down the in-

come tax ceiling from 65% in 1919 to 50% in 1921, and 26% in 1929).

Forced by Roosevelt to make a number of concessions, American Big Business goes to war against the New Deal as soon as the immediate effects of the depression decrease (for example, the private electricity companies withdraw their advertising—which, in the USA, is equivalent to a death sentence—from the newspapers which support Roosevelt and his Tennessee Valley Authority) and they do everything in their power to win the 1940 election.

All this allows us to assume that in 1938–39, Fox, managed by the (also) Republican Zanuck, participated in its own way in the Republican offensive by producing a film on the legendary character Lincoln. Of all the Republican Presidents, he is not only the most famous, but on the whole the only one capable of attracting mass support, because of his humble origins, his simplicity, his righteousness, his historical role, and the legendary aspects of his career and his death.

This choice is, no doubt, all the less fortuitous on the part of Fox (which—through Zanuck and the contracted producer Kenneth Macgowan—is as usual responsible for taking the initiative in the project, and not Ford) that during the preceding season, the Democrat Sherwood's play "Abe Lincoln in Illinois" had been a great success on Broadway With very likely the simultaneous concern to anticipate the adaptations planned in Hollywood of Sherwood's play (John Cromwell's film with Raymond Massey came out the same year and, unlike Ford's, was very successful), and to reverse the impact of the play and of Lincoln's myth in favour of the Republicans, Zanuck immediately put *Young Mr. Lincoln* into production—it would, however, be wrong to exaggerate the film's political determinism which cannot, under any circumstances, be seen, in contrast, for example, to Zanuck's personal productions, *The Grapes of Wrath*, or *Wilson*, as promoting the company's line.

Producer Kenneth Macgowan's past is that of a famous theatre man. Along with Robert Edmund Jones and Eugene O'Neill, he has been manager of the Provincetown Playhouse; they had had a considerable influence on American theatre. A

friend of Ford's, whom he met at RKO during the period of *The Informer*, he moved over to Fox in 1935 (there he produced *Four Men and a Prayer* among others) and became the man responsible for historical biographies which constitute the core of the company's productions.

Young Mr Lincoln is far from being one of Fox's most important productions in 1939, but this film was shot in particularly favourable conditions; it is one of the few cases in which the original undertaking was least distorted, at least at the production stage: of thirty films produced by Macgowan in the eight years he spent at Fox (1935–43) this is one of the only two which were written by only one scriptwriter (Lamar Trotti) (the other being *The Return of Frank James*, written by S. M. Hellman). Another thing to remark on. these two scripts were written in close collaboration with the directors, who were, therefore, involved at a very early stage instead of being chosen at the last minute, as is the custom, even at Fox (the "directors studio"). Ford even says of the script: "We wrote it together" (with L. Trotti) a rare if not exceptional statement coming from him.

Lamar Trotti had already written two comedies on old America for Ford (of the species known as "Americana"), *Judge Priest* and *Steamboat Round the Bend*, before specialising in historical films with Fox (such as *Drums Along the Mohawk*, directed by Ford after *Young Mr. Lincoln*).

The background to a whole section of the script is the obsession with lynching and legality which is so strong in the thirties' cinema, because of the increase in expeditive justice (lynching), the consequences of gangsterism, the rebirth of terrorist organsations such as the KKK (cf. Lang's *Fury*, Mervyn LeRoy's *They Won't Forget*, Archie Mayo's *Black Legion*). Trotti, a southerner (he was born in Atlanta and had been a crime reporter before editing a local Hearst paper), combined one of Lincoln's most famous anecdotes with a memory from his youth. "When Trotti was a reporter in Georgia he had covered the trial of two young men accused of murder at which their mother, the only witness, would not tell which son had committed the crime. Both were hanged" (Robert G. Dickson, "Kenneth Macgowan" in *Films in Review*, October 1963). In

Lincoln's story, a witness stated having seen, in the moonlight an acquaintance of Lincoln's (Duff Armstrong) participate in a murder. Using an almanac as evidence, Lincoln argued that the night was too dark for the witness to have seen anything and thus obtained Armstrong's acquittal with this plea.

5. FORD AND LINCOLN

Ford had already spent the greater part of his career with Fox: he made thirty-eight movies between 1920 and 1935! Since Zanuck's take over, he had made four movies in two years, the first, in 1936, *The Prisoner of Shark Island* ("I haven't killed Lincoln"). Thus it was to one of the company's older and more trustworthy directors that the project was entrusted. The same year, again with Zanuck, Ford shot *Drums Along the Mohawk* (whose ideological orientation is glaringly obvious: the struggle of the pioneers, side by side with Washington and the Whigs against the English in alliance with the Indians) and, in 1940, *The Grapes of Wrath*, which paints a very gloomy portrait of the America of 1938–39. Despite the fact that he calls himself a-political we know that Ford in any case greatly admires Lincoln as a historical figure and as a person. Ford, too, claims humble peasant origins—but this closeness with Lincoln as a man is, however, moderated by the fact that Ford is also, if not primarily, Irish and Catholic.

In 1924 already, in *The Iron Horse*, Lincoln appears as favouring the construction of the intercontinental railway (industry and unification); at the beginning of *The Prisoner of Shark Island*, we see Lincoln requesting "Dixie" from an orchestra after the Civil War (this is the tune which he "already" plays in *Young Mr Lincoln*): symbolically, the emphasis is put on Lincoln's unifying, nonvindictive side and his deep southern sympathies by means of the hymn of the Confederation; in *Sergeant Rutledge* (1960) he is evoked by the Blacks as their Saviour; the anti-slavery aspect; in *How the West Was Won* (1962) the strategist is presented; finally in *Cheyenne Autumn* (1964), a cornered politician turns to a portrait of Lincoln, presented as the model for the resolution of any crisis.

Each of these films thus concentrates on a particular aspect

either of Lincoln's synthetic personality or of his complex historical role; he thus appears to be a sort of universal referent which can be activated in all situations. As long as Lincoln appears in Ford's fiction as a myth, a figure of reference, a symbol of America, his intervention is natural, apparently in complete harmony with Ford's morality and ideology; the situation is different in a film like *Young Mr Lincoln* where he becomes the protagonist of the fiction. We will see that he can only be inscribed as a Fordian character at the expense of a number of distortions and reciprocal assaults (by him on the course of fiction and by fiction on his historical truth).

6. IDEOLOGICAL UNDERTAKING

What is the subject of *Young Mr Lincoln?* Ostensibly and textually it is "Lincoln's youth" (on the classic cultural model—"Apprenticeship and Travels"). In fact—through the expedient of a simple chronicle of events presented (through the presence and actualisation effect specific to classic cinema) as if they were taking place for the first time under our eyes, it is the *reformulation* of the historical figure of Lincoln on the level of the myth and the eternal.

This ideological project may appear to be clear and simple—of the edifying and apologetic type. Of course, if one considers its statements alone, extracting it as a *separable ideological statement* disconnected from the complex network of determinations through which it is realised and inscribed —through which it possibly even criticises itself—then it is easy to operate an illusory deconstruction of the film through a reading of the demystificatory type (see 1). Our work, on the contrary, will consist in activating this network in its complexity, where philosophical assumptions (idealism, theologism), political determinations (republicanism, capitalism) and the relatively autonomous aesthetic process (characters, cinematic *signifiers,* narrative mode) specific to Ford's writing, intervene simultaneously. If our work, which will necessarily be held to the linear sequentiality of the discourse, should isolate the orders of determination interlocking in the film, it will always be in the perspective of their relations: it therefore demands a recurrent reading, on all levels.

7. METHODOLOGY

Young Mr Lincoln, like the vast majority of Hollywood films, follows linear and chronological narrative, in which events appear to follow each other according to a certain "natural" sequence and logic. Thus two options were open to us: either, in discussing each of the determining moments, to simultaneously refer to all the scenes involved; or to present each scene in its fictional chronological *order* and discuss the different determining moments, emphasising in each case what we believe to be the main determinant (the key signification), and indicating the secondary determinants, which may in turn become the main determinant in other scenes. That first method thus sets up the film as the object of a reading (a text) and then supposedly takes up the totality of its overdetermination networks simultaneously, *without taking account of the repressive operation* which, in each scene, determines the realisation of a key signification; while the second method *bases itself on the key signification of each scene,* in order to understand the scriptural operation (overdetermination and repression) which has set it up.

The first method has the drawback of turning the film into a text which is *readable a priori;* the second has the advantage of making the reading itself participate in the *film's process of becoming-a-text,* and of authorising such a reading only by what authorises it in each successive moment of the film. We have therefore chosen the latter method. The fact that the course of our reading will be modelled on the "cutting" of the film into sequences is absolutely intentional, but the work will involve breaking down the closures of the individual scenes by setting them in action with each other and *in* each other.

8. THE POEM

After the credits (and in the same graphic style: i.e., engraved in marble) there is a poem which consists of a number of questions which "if she were to come back on earth," Lincoln's mother would ask, concerning the destiny of her son.

(a) Let us simply observe for the moment that the figure of the mother is inscribed from the start, and that it is an absent

Mother, already dead, a symbolic figure who will only later make her full impact.

(b) The enumeration of questions on the other hand programmes the development of the film by designating Lincoln's problematic as being that of a choice: the interrogative form of this poem, like a matrix, generates the binary system (the necessity to choose between two careers, two pies, two plaintiffs, two defendants, etc.) according to which the fiction is organised (see 14).

(c) In fact, the main function of the poem, which pretends that the questions posed therein haven't yet been answered (whereas they are only the simulation of questions since they presume the spectator's knowledge of Lincoln's *historical character*), is to set up the dualist nature of film and to initiate the process of a double reading. By inviting the spectator to ask himself "questions" to which he already has the answers, the poem induces him to look at history—something which, for him, has already happened—as if it were "still to happen." Similarly, by on the one hand playing on a fictional structure of the "chronicle" type ("natural" juxtaposition and succession of events, as if they were not dictated by any determinism or directed towards a necessary end), and on the other hand by contriving, in the scenes where a crucial choice must be made by the character, a margin of *feigned indecisiveness* (as if the game had not already been played, Lincoln had not entered history, and as if he was taking every one of his decisions on the spot, in the present), the film thus effects a *naturalisation* of the Lincolnian myth (which already exists as such in the mind of the spectator).

The retroactive action of the spectator's knowledge of the myth on the chronicle of events and the naturalist rewriting of the myth in the divisions of this chronicle thus impose a reading in the future perfect. "What is realised in my story is not the past definite of what once was since it is no more, nor the perfect of what has been in what I am, but the future perfect of what I will have been for what I am in the process of becoming" (Lacan).

A classic *ideological* operation manifests itself here, normally, through questions asked after the event whose answer,

which has already been given, is the very condition for the existence of the question.

9. THE ELECTORAL SPEECH

First scene. A politician dressed in townclothes (John T Stuart, later to become Lincoln's associate in Springfield) addresses a few farmers. He denounces the corrupt politicians, who are in power, and Andrew Jackson, President of the USA; he then introduces the local candidate whom he is sponsoring: young Lincoln. The first shot, in which we see Lincoln, shows him sitting on a barrel leaning backwards, in shirtsleeves, wearing heavy boots (one recognises the classic casualness of Ford's hero, who has returned and/or is above everything). In the next shot, addressing the audience of farmers, Lincoln in a friendly tone (but not without a hint of nervousness) declares: "My politics are short and sweet like your ladies' dances; I am in favour of a National Bank and for everybody's participation in wealth." His first words are "You all know who I am, plain Abraham Lincoln"—this is meant not only for the spectators in the film, who are anyway absent from the screen, but also to involve the spectator of the movie, brought into the cinematic space; thus this treatment in the future perfect is immediately confirmed (see 8).

This programme is that of the Whig party, at that time in opposition. It is in essence the programme of nascent American capitalism: protectionism to favour national industrial production, National Bank to favour the circulation of capital in all the states. The first point traditionally has a place in the programme of the Republican Party (it is thus easily recognisable to the spectator of 1939); the second calls to mind a point in history: while in power before 1830, the Whigs had created a National Bank (helping industrial development in the North) whose powers Jackson, who succeeded them, attempted to weaken: the defence of this bank was thus one of the demands of the Whigs, who later became Republicans.

(a) The specifically *political* notations which introduce the film, have the obvious function of presenting Lincoln as the

candidate (that is, in the future perfect, the President, the champion) of the Republicans.

(b) But the scorn which is immediately shown towards the "corrupt politicians" and the strength in the contrast of Lincoln's programme which is simple as "a dance," have the effect of introducing him (and the Republicans in his wake) as the opposition and the remedy to such "politics." Furthermore we will see later that it is not only his opponents' politics which are "corrupt," but all politics, condemned in the name of morality (the figure of Lincoln will be contrasted, with that of his opponent Douglas, with that of the prosecutor, as the defender of Justice versus the politicians, the Uncompromising versus the manipulators).

This disparagement of politics carries and confirms the *idealist* project of the film (see 4 and 6): moral virtues are worth more than political guile, the Spirit more than the Word (cf. 4, 6, 8). (Likewise, politics appears again, later, as the object of discussion among drunks—quarrel between J P Cass and his acolyte—or of socialite conversation: carriage scene between Mary Todd and Douglas).

But what is most significant here is that the points of the electoral programme are *the only indications* of a *positive relation* between Lincoln and politics, all others being negative (separating Lincoln from the mass of "politicians").

(c) We may be surprised that a film on Lincoln's youth could thus empty out the truly political dimension from the career of the future President. This massive omission is too useful to the film's ideological purpose to be fortuitous. By playing once again on the spectator's knowledge of Lincoln's political and historical role, it is possible to establish the idea that these were founded on and validated by a Morality superior to all politics (and could thus be neglected in favour of their Cause) and that Lincoln always draws his prestige and his strength from an intimate relationship with Law, from a (natural and/or divine) knowledge of Good and Evil. Lincoln *starts* with politics but soon rises to the moral level, divine right, which for an idealist discourse—originates and valorises all politics. Indeed, the first scene of the film already shows Lincoln as a political candidate without providing any

information either on what may have brought him to this stage: *concealment of origins* (both his personal—family—origins and those of his political knowledge, however basic: that is "his education") which establishes the mythical nature of the character; or on the results of this electoral campaign (we know that he was defeated, and that the Republicans' failure resulted in the shelving of the National Bank, among other things): as if they were in fact of no importance in the light of the already evident significance of fate and the myth. Lincoln's character makes all politics appear trivial.

But this very *repression* of politics, on which the ideological undertaking of the film is based, is itself a *direct result* of political assumptions (the eternal false idealist debate between morality and politics: Descartes versus Machiavelli) and at the level of its reception by the spectator, this repression is not without consequences of an equally political nature. We know that the ideology of American Capitalism (and the Republican Party which traditionally represents it) is to assert its divine right, to conceptualise it in terms of permanence, naturalism and even biology (cf. Benjamin Franklin's famous formula: "Remember that money has genital potency and fecundity") and to extol it as a universal Good and Power. The enterprise consisting of the concealment of politics (of social relations in America, of Lincoln's career) under the idealist mask of Morality has the effect of regilding the cause of Capital with the gold of myth, by manifesting the "spirituality" in which American Capitalism believes it finds its origins and sees its eternal justification. The seeds of Lincoln's future were already sown in his youth—the future of America (its eternal values) is already written into Lincoln's moral virtues, which include the Republican Party and Capitalism.

(d) Finally, with the total suppression of Lincoln's political dimension, his main historico-political characteristic disappears from the scene of the film: i.e., his struggle against the Slave States. Indeed, neither in the initial political sequence, nor in the rest of the film is this dominant characteristic of his history, of his legend even, indicated, whereas it is mainly to it that Lincoln owes his being inscribed into American history more than any other President (Republican or otherwise).

Strangely enough, only one allusion is made to slavery (this exception has the value of a signal): Lincoln explains to the defendants' family that he had to leave his native state since "with all the slaves coming in, white folks just had a hard time making a living." The fact that this comment emphasises the economic aspects of the problem at the expense of its moral and humantarian aspects would appear to contradict the points outlined above (primacy of morality over politics) if Lincoln had not spoken these words in a scene (see 19) where he puts himself in the imaginary role of the son of the poor farmer family He recalls his own origins as a poor white who, like everyone else, suffered from unemployment. The accent is thus put on the economic problem, i.e., the problem of the whites, not the blacks.

The *not-said* here, this exclusion from the scene of the film of Lincoln's most notable political dimension, can also not be fortuitious (the "omission" would be enormous!), it too must have *political significance*

On the one hand, it was indeed necessary to present Lincoln as the unifier, the harmoniser, and not the divider of America (this is why he likes playing "Dixie" he is a Southerner). On the other hand, we know that the Republican Party, abolitionist by economic opportunism, after the Civil War rapidly reappeared as more or less racist and segregationist. (Already, Lincoln was in favour of a progressive emancipation of the blacks, which would only slowly give them equal rights with the whites). He never concealed the restrictions he asked for concerning the integration of blacks. Considering the political impact that the film could have in the context described above (see 3, 4) it would have been in bad taste on both these accounts to insist on Lincoln's liberating role.

This feature is thus silenced, excluded from the hero's youth, as if it had not appeared until later, when all the legendary figure's other features are given by the film as present from the outset and are given value by this predestination.

The shelving of this dimension (the Civil War) which is directly responsible for the Lincolnian Legend thus allows a political use of this legend and, at the same time, by castrating Lincoln of his historico-political dimension, reinforces the idealisation of the myth.

But the exclusion of this dominant sign from Lincoln's politics is also possible because *all the others* are rapidly pushed out (except for the brief positive and negative notations mentioned above which in any case are in play as *indicators*—of the general repression of politics—and of stamping of the Republican cause by the seal of the Myth) and because this fact places the film immediately on the purely ideological plane (Lincoln's a-historical dimension, his symbolic value).

Thus what *projects the political meaning* of a film is not a directly political discourse: it is *a moralising discourse* History, almost totally reduced to the time scale of the myth with neither past nor future can thus, at best, only survive in the film in the form of a *specific repetition:* on the teleological model of history as a continuous and linear development of a pre-existing *seed*, of the future contained in the past (anticipation, predestination). Everything is there, all the features and characters of the historical scene are in their place (Mary Todd who will become Lincoln's wife, Douglas whom he will beat at the presidential elections, etc., right up to Lincoln's death. in a scene which Fox cut, before the film was first released, one could see Lincoln stop in front of a theatre presenting Hamlet and facing one of the (Booth family) troupe of actors—(his future murderer), the problematic of deciding (see 14) and of unifying is already posed. . The only missing thing is the main historical feature, this being the one on which the myth was first constructed.

But such repression is possible (acceptable by the spectator) only inasmuch as the film plays on what is *already known* about Lincoln, treating it as if it were a factor of *non-recognition* and at the limit, a not-known (at least, something that nobody wants to know any more, which for having been known is all the more easily forgotten)· it is the already constituted force of the myth which allows not only its reproduction, but also its reorientation. It is the universal knowledge of Lincoln's fate which allows, while restating it, the omission of parts of it. For the problem here is not to build a myth, but to negotiate its realisation and even more to rid it of its historical roots in order to liberate its universal and eternal meaning. "Told," Lincoln's youth is in fact *rewritten* by what has to filter through the Lincolnian myth. The film establishes not only

Lincoln's total predestination (teleological axis) but also that *only that to which he has been shown to be predestined* deserves immortality (theological axis). A double operation of addition and subtraction at the end of which the historical axis, having been abolished and mythified, returns cleansed of all impurities and thus recuperable to the service not just of Morality but of the morality re-asserted by capitalist ideology Morality not only rejects politics and surpasses history, it also rewrites them.

10. THE BOOK

Lincoln's electoral speech seems to open up a fiction. electoral campaign, elections. A problem is presented, which we have the right to expect to see solved, but which in fact will not be solved. To use the Barthesian formula, we have the elements of a hermeneutic chain. enigma (will he or won't he be elected?) and non-resolution. This chain is abandoned by the use of an abrupt fictional displacement: the arrival of the family of farmers. Lincoln is called away to help them. This family comprises the father, the mother and two twelve year old boys. They want to buy some material from Lincoln thus informing us of his occupation. he is a shopkeeper But the family has no money· Lincoln offers them credit, and confronted by the mother's embarassment, argues that he himself has acquired his shop on credit. The situation is resolved by the use of barter· the family owns a barrel full of old books (left behind by the grandfather). Delighted at the mere mention of a book (legendary thirst for reading). Lincoln respectfully takes one out of the barrel: *as if by chance*, it is Blackstone's "Commentaries." He dusts the book, opens it, reads, realises that it is about Law (he says: "Law") and is delighted that the book is in good condition (the Law is indestructible).

(a) It's a *family* (see 19) of pioneers who are *passing through* that give Lincoln the opportunity of coming in contact with Law· emphasis on the luck-predestination connection as well as on the fact that *even without knowing it* it is the humble who transmit Law (religiously kept by the family as a legacy from the ancestor). On the other hand we have here a classic Fordian fictional feature (apart from the family as a displaced

Henry Fonda, in *Young Mr Lincoln* (1939), "dusts the book, opens it, reads, realizes that it is about Law (he says: 'Law') and is delighted that the book is in good condition (the law is indestructible). It's a *family* of pioneers who are *passing through* that give Lincoln the opportunity of coming in contact with Law " (EDITORS, page 798). Henry Fonda and Pauline Moore in *Young Mr Lincoln*. "It is in nature that Lincoln communes with Law: It is at the moment of this communion that he meets Woman " (EDITORS, page 801).

centre): meeting and exchange between two groups whose paths need not have crossed (a new fictional sequence is born from this very meeting; it is first presented as a suspension and simple digressive delay of the main narrative axis, later it constitutes itself as being central, until another sequence arises, functioning in the same mode, Ford's total fiction existing finally only as an articulation of successive digressions).

(b) Lincoln makes a brief but precise speech in praise of credit: "I give you credit"—"I don't like credit" (says the farmer-woman incarnating the dignity of the poor)—"I myself bought my shop on credit" when one is aware of the role played by the extension of credit in the 1929 crisis, this kind of publicity slogan uttered by an American hero (who later, with ever increasing emphasis, will be the Righteous man) tends to appear as a form of exorcism: without credit, the development of capital is impossible; in a period of recession (1935–40), when unemployment is high, and wages have gone down, the maintenance of the level of consumption is the only thing which allows industry to carry on.

(c) The fact that Law is acquired by barter introduces a circuit of debt and repayments which is to run through the film (see 23)

d) The principle function of this sequence is to introduce a number of constituent elements of the symbolic scene from which the film is to proceed by *varying* and activating it (in this sense it is the true expository scene of the fiction, the first scene becoming pretextual and possibly even *extra-textual*): The Book and the Law, the Family and the Son, exchange and debt, predestination. This *setting up* of the fictional matrix means *putting aside* the first sequence (political speech): a simple digression, first believed to be temporary, but then seen to be in fact the first step in the operation of the repression of politics by morality which will continue through the whole film (see 9).

11. NATURE, LAW, WOMAN

Third sequence: lying in the grass under a tree, near a river, Lincoln is reading Blackstone's "Commentaries." He sum-

marises its theories in a few sentences: "The right to acquire and hold property . the right to life and reputation and wrongs are a violation of those rights that's all there is to it: right and wrong. " A young woman appears and expresses surprise that he should lie down while reading. He gets up and answers: "When I'm lying down, my mind's standing up, when I'm standing up, my mind lies down." They walk along the river discussing Lincoln's ambitions and culture (poets, Shakespeare, and now Law). They stop and while she is talking he starts to stare at her and tells her that he thinks she is beautiful. This declaration of love continues for a few moments, centered on the question of those who do and those who don't like redheads, then the young girl leaves the scene (the frame, the shot). Alone, Lincoln approaches the river and throws a stone into it. Close up of the ripples on the water.

(a) The first anecdotic *signifié* of the scene refers to Lincoln's legend. like any layman in law in the States at that time, Lincoln discovers Law in Blackstone. His "Commentaries" were young America's legal Bible and they largely inspired the 1787 constitution. They are, in fact, no more than a summary and a confused vulgarisation of 18th Century English Law The second anecdotic *signifié* (again made explicit in the following scene) is Lincoln's first acknowledged love affair, his relationship with Ann Rutledge—presented in the legend and the film as the ideal wife (who shares similar tastes) whom he will never meet again.

(b) Centred on Lincoln, the scene presents the relationship Law-Woman-Nature which will be articulated according to a system of complementarity and of substitution-replacement.

It is in nature that Lincoln communes with Law·

It is at the moment of this communion that he meets Woman. the relationship Lincoln-Woman replaces the relationship Lincoln-Law since Woman simultaneously interrupts Lincoln's reading of the book by her arrival and marks her appreciation of Lincoln's knowledge and encourages him in his vocation as man of knowledge and Law

The declaration of love is made according to the classic (banal) cultural analogy Nature-Woman, in Nature (on the

bank of a river). But above all the promotion of the river to the status of the woman corresponds to the Woman's (the wife's) disappearance from the sequence (which in the fiction turns out to be definitive); this promotion is signalled by the throwing of the stone (see 18).

Just as culturally determined and codified as the relationship Nature-Woman, the equivalence Nature-Law is here underlined precisely by the fact that the Law book is Blackstone, for whom all forms of Law (the laws of gravitation as well as those which regulate society) grow from a natural Law which is none other than God's law In the final analysis, this supreme law separates Good from Evil, and is indeed called upon to legislate on the soundness of other human laws (the spirit against the word, see 6, 7, 9). Consequence: the acquisition and the defence of property are here presented as being based on the natural, indeed, on the divine (cf. the ideology of capitalism, 4, 9).

12. THE TOMB, THE BET

The ripples caused by the stone falling in the river dissolve into ice breaking up on the same river, as a transition between the scenes. A "dramatic" music underlines this passage. Lincoln arrives near a tomb covered in snow, near the river, at the spot where the preceding scene took place. Ann Rutledge's name can be read on the marble stone. Lincoln places a bunch of flowers on the tomb, while soliloquising on the return of spring ("the woods are already full of them too, the snow when it's drifting . ice breaking up coming of the spring"). He says he is still hesitant on the path to follow· whether to stay in the village or to follow Ann's advice, go to town and choose a legal career He picks up a twig of dead wood. if it falls towards Ann, he will choose law, if not, he will stay in the village. The twig falls on Ann's side. Lincoln, kneeling down, says: "Well Ann, you win, it's the Law" and after a moment of silence "I wonder if I could have tipped it your way just a little."

(a) The dissolve, which links the scene of the declaration of love (see 11) to that of the loved one's tomb, gives the impression that the transition from one to the other follows the same time-scale as the transition from summer to spring (the breaking ice) according to a symbolic (classic) opposition of the seasons: life/death (and resurrection). There is at the same time a smooth (continuous) succession from one season to the other, and a brutal contrast (Ann alive in one shot, dead in the next) between the two scenes. The effect of temporal continuity reinforces the violence of the contrast (the fictional shock) between life and death.

This process of temporal sequence and continuity (which is specific to great classical cinema) has in fact the function of absorbing referential time by juxtaposing and connecting two events (romance, death) separated by what will appear only later (at his arrival in Springfield) to be an interval of many years. This elimination has the effect of presenting Lincoln's first decisive choice (to become a lawyer) as if it had been neither thought out nor elaborated, nor rational. it *denies him the time of reflection*, it abolishes all *work*. Thus, once again, following the film's general strategy, it submits the hero to predestination, by reducing referential time to cinematic time: new *coup de force* by the film.

(b) Lincoln's definitive acceptance of Law is thus, once again, made under Woman's direct influence (we have seen in 11 the nature of her relationship with Law and Nature) and is in phase with the awakening of nature. But despite the fact that this decision is inevitable, both because of the logic of the symbolic axis Woman-Nature-Law, and because of the spectator's knowledge of Lincoln's fate, the film skilfully creates suspense, pretending that luck could change the course of events. As with Hitchcock with whom suspense, far from being weakened by our knowledge of the outcome, is increased at each viewing by this knowledge, the tension built up in the scene, far from being compromised by our knowledge of Lincoln's future (perfect), is increased by it. The film's supreme guile then consists in reintroducing—deceptively—at the very end of the scene the indication of intention, a voluntary choice on Lincoln's part ("I wonder if I could have tipped it your way just a little") which is, in fact, no more than a feigned delegation of power: as if Lincoln's already-accomplished destiny

were referring to him to decide its path, following Spinoza's principle of "verum index sui," of truth as indicator of itself, *the self-determination of an already determined figure.*

13. THE PLAINTIFFS

Lincoln's arrival in Springfield. He sets himself up as a solicitor Two Mormon farmers consult him, intending to take legal action. One owes the other money and the second has satisfied himself by violently beating up the first; therefore the first is claiming damages of an amount roughly equivalent to his debt. Having read the two plaintiffs' statements, Lincoln informs them of the quasi equivalence of their respective debts, the difference being equal to his bill; faced with their hesitation he threatens the use of force, if they don't accept his compromise. The farmers agree to pay him, and one of them tries to give him a fake coin. Lincoln first notices this by the sound it produces, then by biting the coin, and the scene ends on Lincoln's very insistent stare fixed on the forger.

(a) Lincoln's first legal act in the film is the solution of an extremely commonplace case. In fact, this anecdote which introduces the viewer to the violence of social relations in Lincoln's period, indicates his legal function which throughout the film is to repress violence even, as a final resort, by the use of a specifically legal violence (incarnated in Lincoln's physical strength but, most of the time, simply manifested by a verbal threat).

(b) The scene insists on Lincoln's supreme *cleverness,* in resolving any situation, the Law being able to decide either by taking one side against the other, or like here, by craftily restoring the balance between the two sides of the scales. This second solution is obviously preferred by the film because it emphasises Lincoln's legendary unifying role.

(c) Lincoln knows about money· he is not interested in its origin (credit, exchange, debt form, a circle) but it has a ring, a consistency, a value. It is precisely about a money-swindle that Lincoln's *castrating power* (see 16 and 22) is manifested for the first time, as an empty, icy, terrifying stare and his speed at hitting his opponents where it hurts, characteristics which

will constitute the terrifying dimension of Lincoln's figure accentuated from scene to scene. Here for the first time the supreme process of Law eclipses the anecdotal character of Lincoln.

It will be observed that this terrifying dimension widely exceeds all the connotative *signifiés* (whether psychological—"I'm a farmer too, you can't fool me," or moral—reprobation, or situational, etc.) which could be applied to it. The irreducible character of Lincoln's castrating figure will persist throughout the film, transcending, altering the ideological discourse.

14. THE CELEBRATIONS

It is in order to take part in the Independence Day celebrations that Lincoln is in such a hurry to conclude the quarrel between the farmers. This celebration is made up of a number of episodes, announced in a programme, the order of which we will follow· (a) a parade (in which Lincoln meets Douglas, his opponent, and Mary Todd, his future wife); (b) a pie judging contest in which Lincoln is the judge (and during which the family from the first scene reappear); (c) a Tug of War (across a pond) in which Lincoln takes part (and in the course of which there is an incident between the family and two roughnecks); (d) a rail splitting contest (longitudinal section of a tree trunk) which Lincoln wins; (e) the burning of tar barrels.

(a) Lincoln is confronted by a historical evocation of America: the local militias parade past him, followed by the veterans of the war against Spain, and finally the survivors of the War of Independence, whom Lincoln salutes by removing his top hat. But Lincoln's slightly ridiculous solemnity is underlined on the one hand by the other spectators' joyful exuberance, and on the other by a succession of grotesque incidents, coupled with the veterans' shabby appearance, very much in the Fordian tradition.

(b) The principle of Justice (whether or not to choose) is here realised through a series of derivatives which exhaust all its modalities: either Lincoln literally splits a rail in two, and

thus separates himself from, places himself above his opponents (adventitious meaning: affirmation of the physical strength of literally his cutting edge): or he doesn't hesitate to give *his* side, that is the right side, a helping hand, to help it win (by tying the rope to a horse-drawn cart): Law represented by its ideal figure has every right: just as it doesn't hesitate to use force (see 13, 16) so it doesn't shrink before the use of cunning and deception, a deception whose scandalous aspect is masked by the triviality of the stake; and the "Fordian gag" aspect of the action. Finally, more subtly, faced with the undecidable character of a situation (the ethic, or gastronomic, impossibility of preferring the product of one cook to that of another) the fiction itself must, by abandoning the scene, censor the moment of choice and not show Lincoln making an impossible choice, both for the sake of the scene and for that of the myth.

(c) The celebration sequence is made up of a series of fictionally autonomous *sketches* which are in fact determined by the necessity of presenting a certain number of Lincoln's features. This mode of narration continues and stresses that of the preceding scenes: namely a succession of sequences whose length can vary but which are all subject to the *unity of action*. Indeed each of them establishes a situation, presents, develops and syntagmatically encloses an action (whether this latter is resolved in terms of the diegesis or not: nothing said of the consequences of the electoral speech, no decision about the pies). (Insofar as it closes a scene only, the closure does not preclude the later reinvestment of any one of the elements which the scene has elevated to the status of a signifier: for example, the Law book or the Mother).

In fact it is at the moment of its greatest systematisation (a series of headings) that this mode of narration is *infiltrated by the first elements of a new narrative principle* (that of the detective story enigma and its solution. a hermeneutic chain which articulates all the following sequences). Indeed, during the different episodes of the celebration, characters who will all play a more or less important role in the problem are present: Douglas and Mary Todd, the Clay family, the two bad boys, and a few extras who will reappear at the lynching and the

trial. This new narrative device is reinforced (at the end of the celebration) by a scene (between Carrie Sue and her fiancé, Matt, the younger Clay son) which seems to reproduce Hollywood's most banal clichés (chatter of lovers, discussion of the future: how many children); in fact it is important insofar as it is the first scene from which Lincoln is physically absent. He is, however, constantly mentioned: first, indirectly, by Carrie Sue, who is very excited by the celebration and makes her fiancé promise to bring her back every year (what can be here taken as a simple whim, the manifestation of innocent joy and desire—the innocence briefly unmasked when she tells Matt she wishes "we was married right now. ."—will be revealed and accentuated in all the scenes where Carrie Sue is present as the systematic denial of the violent erotic attraction provoked—not in her alone—by Lincoln of the direction indicated by the film in 19 where Lincoln identifies her with Ann Rutledge); then, directly, by the fiancé who says: "I wish it was going to be that fella's splitting them rails again," taking it on himself to formulate on her behalf *what she cannot say*.

15. THE MURDER

The new plot, which this scene develops and which is to dominate the rest of the film, started, as we noted, with the appearance of a number of elements which disturb the course of the celebration and its narrative presentation; the deputy sheriff (Scrub White) and his friend (J. Palmer Cass) somewhat worked up and high, pester Adam's (one of the Clay sons) wife. A fight breaks out, and is stopped by the mother's (Abigail Clay) intervention. This forgotten quarrel brutally reemerges during the final act of the celebration: the burning of the tar barrels. The two brothers and Scrub White start fighting again, this results in the death of the latter.

We have purposely not described the scene here; it is literally *indescribable*, insofar as it is the realisation—through the succession and length of the shots, abrupt changes of angle, play on distance, the reactions, and the behaviour of the participants, the successive arrival of witnesses—of an amazing system of *deception* which affects all the characters implicated

in the event, and blinds them as well as the spectator. The radical difference between Ford's procedure here, and other films of the enigma, must at first give the spectator only scraps of knowledge and deprive him of a number of clues, the revelation of which, after the event, will provide the solution to the plot; whereas here, on the contrary, everything is given, present, but undecipherable, and it can only be deciphered at the second, *informed*, look.

The system of deception here set up is effective because *it develops as the scene progresses:* all the characters are caught up in it and duped, thus making it more powerful, and the spectator, witnessing these successive mystifications and called upon to agree with all, is thus the most deceived.

But we must also note that the effect of the deception continues and is *legitimised* by the substitution of a deceptive question: *which of the two brothers killed him?* for the real question: who killed him? The former question implies that the latter has already been answered, thus (successfully) suppressing the first: it will only be brought back by Lincoln (see 22).

All the different characters of the scene—*among them the spectator*—have either an active or a passive relationship to the deception—either way strengthening its influence. The spectator, who will be completely duped, is the initial witness of the fight: for him a perfectly plausible causal chain is constituted (except for one thing which we will specify): a cause of death. the shot; an effect: the wounded man's moans as he lies on the ground; reactions of the guilty· the two brothers, frightened, take refuge near their mother who has just arrived. There is only one element to contradict this causal chain: before hearing the shot, we see Scrub White's arm, which holds the weapon, turned away. But this element of confusion (Scrub White appearing to be seriously wounded by his own weapon when it was pointed elsewhere) far from invalidates this first setting up of the deception; on the contrary, it provokes distraction, thus permitting the intervention of a new factor (Cass's arrival) to pass almost unnoticed: the wounded man's death throes at this point can easily be accommodated by a classic typology: dying-in-one's-best-friend's-arms.

Cass, arriving during this break in attention, kneels down

by his friend, placing himself *between him and the spectator* (long shot). He gets up in a *close up* shot, holding a bloody knife (a weapon which had not previously been seen): a shot which *independently of his drama* (as in Kuleshov's experiment) *is classically a shot of the guilty* (which is indeed what Cass is, since it is he who gave his friend this fatal knife wound but we will only learn this at the end of the movie, *even though all this has already been shown but rendered not-readable*).

The two sons Adam and Matt behave, even before Cass's arrival (ever since the shot was fired), like guilty men. Cass saying "He's dead" confirms them in this guilt; each one believes the other to be guilty but takes responsibility for the crime to protect his brother.

The mother intervenes when the shot is fired, and, seeing a man aground and her two sons alive but frightened, enters into the system of deception in her turn, believing them to be guilty. This feeling is strengthened when Cass gets up showing the knife, a knife which she recognises, believing then that she knows which of her two sons is guilty. But since they both accuse themselves, she plays the game and refuses to say which one she believes to be guilty (refusing to sacrifice one for the sake of the other). This refusal reinforces the deception because it accepts the displacement of the question: the mother thinks she keeps a secret, but it is the wrong one.

The spectator in his turn accepts this second causal chain: since the victim has been murdered with a knife by one of the two brothers, the gun shot from now on appears to him as a trivial episode, even a digression.

Thus what is happening here is precisely the cinematic questioning of direct vision, of perception insofar as it conceals the structure. The work that needs to be done to make the scene legible is not a search for hidden meanings, but the bringing to light of the *meaning which is already there:* which is why, paradoxically, it is our type of reading (see 1) of the film *in its entirety* which is called for and justified by this central scene.

This sequence and the preceding one (dialogue between the lovers) constitute, as we have already said, *a new fiction, from which Lincoln is absent.* He only comes into it when everything

is decided (the crime committed, the accused taken away by the sheriff): neither actor, nor witness, *a priori* uninvolved in the problem, he *has no knowledge of it*. This is a necessary condition, in terms of Lincoln's mythical role, for the truth to emerge by magical rather than scientific means: to solve this crime story situation Lincoln will use means very different from those of an enquiry along ordinary thriller lines.

16. THE LYNCHING

(a) Introduced at the end of the celebration by the burning of the barrels (a commonplace episode in American celebrations, but here dramatically emphasised by the double fictional and historical context: KKK/fascist *auto-da-fés*), the cycle of violence (fight, crime) will culminate with the lynching. (The scene thereby acquires extra political significance because in the years 1925–35 a large number of lynchings took place in the USA—see films from that period, e.g., *Fury*.) This violence carries with it an acceleration of the narrative: between the moment when the defendants are taken away and the one when the lynching starts, there are only a few seconds, the time of a reframing; during this time Lincoln offers his legal services to the mother. She asks who he is, since she doesn't recognise him as the man who once gave her credit (this is not without importance, see the circulation of the debts 19) whereas he has just recognised her as the woman who gave him the Book. He answers, after a pause, "I'm your lawyer, ma'am."

(b) Inside the prison, under attack from the lynchers, there is a violent contrast between the understandable nervousness of the defendants and the sheriff and the unjustifiable panic of Cass (who has just been promoted deputy sheriff), for the second time—and here again in a non-readable way—the film exposes Cass as the culprit, i.e., as the man who is afraid of being lynched.

(c) Lincoln's action, insofar as he represents Law, can only be the, if necessary, violent, prohibition of any non-legal violence. Since the whole film is meant to manifest Lincoln's absolute superiority to all those who surround him, the scene of

the lynching provides the opportunity for a masterly demonstration of it in a number of set scenes, each new stage of his victory increasing his castrating violence; this is inversely proportional to the expenditure of physical violence (since, in the ideological discourse, Law must have power insofar as it is legitimised by its own statement, not through physical strength, which is used as a last resort and often simply as a verbal threat). Here the escalation of legal repression is effected in many stages: 1. alone, Lincoln physically repels the lynchers' assault (courage and physical strength), 2. he incites one of the leaders to single combat, this the man evades (verbal threat based on knowledge of the opponent's weakness), 3. he defuses the crowd's anger by a cunning speech (so cunning, that the mother, not knowing *who he is*—i.e., in the fiction a good man, and in the myth President Lincoln—takes his speech literally and is very disturbed, before *believing* in him); he is also humorous (shifting to another level: complicity/familiarity with the crowd), 4. he throws back on the crowd the threat of its own violence by showing it that each one of them one way or the other, could be lynched (intimidation producing terror), 5. addressing one individual amongst the lynchers, whom he knows to be a religious man, he threatens him with retribution in the name of the Bible (ultimate recourse to divine writing as an instance of the Law). Lincoln's castrating triumph is sanctioned in the film itself not only by the subsiding of the crowd's anger, but very precisely by the lowering of the tree trunk, which on Lincoln's order is dropped by the lynchers—who are dispersing. (Note that it is with this same tree trunk that the lynchers attempted to break open the prison door, protected by Lincoln's body.)

17. THE DANCE

Invited by Mary Todd to a dance (the invitation card, congratulating him on his attitude in this "recent deplorable uprising" says, "My sister invites you . . " here again, denial of desire), Lincoln abandoning his boots, vigorously shines his black high button shoes, and with the same unusual concern to be smart cuts his hair (see the anecdote told by Eisen-

stein about the new President moving to Washington: "he went as far as cleaning his own boots. Somebody said. *Gentlemen never clean their boots—And whose boots do real gentlemen clean?*"). The dance is in full swing, elegant and very genteel. Lincoln enters the lobby and is immediately surrounded by elderly gentlemen whom he entertains with funny stories (which we cannot hear). He is asked about his family ("Are you by any chance a member of the well-known Lincoln family from Massachusetts?"—"I'd say the evidence is against it if they own land"). Mary Todd responds absentmindedly to Douglas's advances, she is only interested in Lincoln. She goes to him and demands that he ask her to dance. He replies that he would very much like to dance with her, but warns her that he is a very poor dancer. He follows her to the middle of the dance floor, they start to dance a kind of waltz, then a polka, which Mary Todd suddenly interrupts and drags Lincoln to the balcony

(a) The dance sequence is more or less compulsory in Ford's films. These dances almost always have the function first of setting up and ordering a ritual *miming ideal harmony*, which in fact is far from regulating the relations of the social group; then later, to disturb, unmask and destroy this simulation of harmony by the intervention of a foreign element. Here Lincoln's social heterogeneity gives place to the realisation of his symbolic otherness (figure of the Law): this involves him (socially and sexually) in a seduction relationship which simultaneously *integrates and excludes him;* this causes a confusion which is not resolved dramatically, unlike what takes place in other Ford films (cf. the dance in *Two Rode Together, Fort Apache* for example).

(b) The scandal of Lincoln's difference is even more noticeable to the spectators than to the characters of the scene. First it is apparent at the *physical* level, his shape, size, gait, rigidity, his undertaker look (Lincoln's mythical costume), then, while he is dancing, in the lack of co-ordination and rhythm in his movements. On the other hand, the social difference (made clear in the scene where Lincoln is dressing for the dance), emphasised by the question about his family, is immediately defused of any political significance and deflected into an amiable originality (it is out of the question according to the film's ideological system, that his class origins should play anything but a positive role).

(c) But it is at the symbolic level that the scandal is most apparent. In terms of the logic of castration, Lincoln's status, whereas it is realised in the lynching scene in its active form (castrating action), figures here in the passive form: that of *inversion* (the fact that these two dimensions—the action of castrating/being castrated—belong together will be made obvious in the balcony scene). Indeed, Mary Todd fully takes the initiative. First she expresses her resentment at Lincoln's coldness (in her conversation with Douglas); then she accuses Lincoln of not making the first move, and demands that he dance with her; finally she brings the dance to a sudden halt and drags him out to the balcony. Thus if the dance scene signifies the hero's social recognition (reward), the dance with Mary Todd puts him into a real castration, the retroactive effect of the lynching scene (which already implied it logically, writing it into the unconscious of Ford's text). There the castrating action was made on the basis of a castration which becomes effective in the dance scene and particularly in the balcony scene.

18. THE BALCONY

As soon as he is on the balcony, Lincoln is enchanted by the river Mary Todd waits for a moment for Lincoln to speak or show some interest in her. Then she draws aside, leaving him alone in front of the river

(a) Dance, balcony, river, moonlight, couple: all these elements create a romantic, intimate, sentimental atmosphere. The scene, however, mercilessly destroys this atmosphere (whose physical signifieds could be already read as more fantastic than romantic) to introduce the dimension of the Sacred.

(b) The transfer from one dimension to the other is effected by Lincoln's enchantment with the river· the commonplace accessory of the "romantic scene" is shifted to another scene and is at the same time the agent of this shift: another scene (from which Mary Todd, having no place, withdraws) in

which a process of displacement-condensation takes place so that the river simultaneously evokes the first woman Lincoln loved (Ann Rutledge)—an evocation here emptied of any nostalgic or sentimental character—and (see 11) the relationship Nature-Woman-Law. The river is here the ratification of Lincoln's contract with Law. Lincoln, faced with his fate, accepts it; the classic moment of any mythological story Here the hero sees his future written and accepts its revelation (the balcony, also a typical accessory of romantic love scenes, is here promoted, by Lincoln's gesture and the camera angle, to the anticipated role of the presidential balcony). Correlatively, Lincoln's renunciation of pleasure is written here: from now on Ann Rutledge's death must be read as the real origin both of his castration and of his identification with the Law; and the "inversion" of the dance scene as well as its relation to the lynching scene take on their true meaning: Lincoln does not have the phallus, he is the phallus (see Lacan, "*La signification du phallus*").

19. THE FAMILY

Immediately after the lynching Lincoln accompanies the mother (Mrs. Clay) and her two daughters-in-law back to their wagon. He tells her, "My mother would be just about your age if she were alive, you know she used to look a lot like you." After the scene of the balcony and before the opening of the trial, he goes to visit the family. On his way to the Clay farm, as he passes the river again, his companion tells him, "I've never known a fella look at a river like you do; fella would think it was a pretty girl the way you carry on" (see 11, 18).

(a) The scene in the farm yard acts as a reminder: Lincoln fantasises himself in the role of son of the family First, by chopping wood (see 14), he evokes the time when this was his daily task—and compares himself to the son of the family Then, one by one all the elements of the scene remind him of his house, his garden, his trees, the members of his family; he himself asserts the sequence of these equivalences: Mrs. Clay = his mother, Sarah = his dead sister, whose name was also Sarah, Carrie Sue = Ann Rutledge; and even the dish which is

being cooked is his favourite dish: turnips. This insistent parallelism between the Lincoln family and the Clay family is carried through to the *absence* of the father· total exclusion in the case of Lincoln's father who is not even mentioned; the disappearance from the fiction of Mr Clay (present in the first scene) is explained by an "accident." The rejection of the Name of the Father logically corresponds to Lincoln's identification with the Law (his installation in the place of the great Other) which can neither guarantee itself nor originate itself through any other law than itself. We can here diagnose the *paranoia* which governs the symbolics of the film.

This reliving of memories also has the function of stressing Lincoln's social origins (see 9).

(b) This climate of nostalgic effusion—unique in the film—is brutally interrupted by one of Lincoln's fixed stares which can from now on be understood as the mark of his possession by Law Giving up the role of son, he becomes inquisitor, interrupts the mother by asking her persistently which of her two sons is guilty. Terrified she refuses to answer (as she had done earlier in front of the sheriff, and will do later in front of the prosecutor). Her consternation affects Lincoln and makes him immediately cast off his attitude of investigator; he gives up both trying to discover the mother's secret (but it is a useless secret) and separate the two sons (for the problematic of one or the other, he substitutes that of all or nothing) and once again symbolically takes their place beside the mother. Let us add that the film firmly avoids a possibility which could have been exploited: namely that the question of the choice between the two sons might upset Lincoln himself, make him doubt or worry for a moment: Lincoln is totally ignorant of the *lamma sabbachtani*.

(c) But this scene has the simultaneous function of continuing the circuit of debt and gift which links and will continue to link Lincoln and the mother, and of providing it with an *origin:* fictionally introduced by the exchange—unequal in Lincoln's favour—of the material for the Book (see 10), it seems at the symbolic level to go back to the time when the child "used to stretch out while my mother read to me"; the situation is here reversed since Mrs. Clay can't read and it is Lincoln—

still paying off this debt of which Mrs. Clay is unaware—who reads her the letter from her sons (note the way in which he pronounces the first words of this letter: "Dear Ma").

The origin of Lincoln's knowledge is here given for the second time (see 11) as being feminine-maternal; the same equivalence Woman-Nature-(Mother)-Law is once again posed, the identification of Lincoln to the Law being related to the preliminary identification of the Law with Nature and Woman-Wife-Mother; the debt contracted by Lincoln towards his mother (she teaches him to read) as well as Mrs. Clay (she gives the Book) and Ann Rutledge (she pushes him towards knowledge) can only be "paid back" by his assumption of this mission, and his incarnation of the Law Let us not insist on the assumptions behind this series (see 6), but notice that the circulation of the debt and its resolution are here enriched with an extra indicator: to answer, under the mother's dictation, the sons' letter, Lincoln asks Sarah for some paper; she gives him an almanac. Thus it is from the same family that Law and Truth originate: through the Book (the carrier of the Law) and the almanac: first used as a support for writing (letter from the mother to the imprisoned sons), it will reveal the truth when *exhibited by Lincoln* (see 22); it carries the solution to the enigma, it is the sign of Truth.

20. THE TRIAL

(a) The trial, a classic feature of Hollywood cinema, represents the staging of American legalist ideology and constitutes a microcosm of the social whole (sample of the different social strata represented by this or that type, this or that "silhouette"); confidence in the forms of legality is based precisely on this representativeness of the trial: it is America itself which constitutes the Jury, and who cannot be wrong, so that the Truth cannot fail to manifest itself by the end of the proceedings (carried out according to an almost ritualised alternation of comic and tragic moments). We have here a slight departure from this traditional trial, since the question is not to prove the culpability or the innocence of a defendant, but to *choose* (according to the principle of alternatives which has

regulated the whole film) between two defendants. But here, as everywhere else, the constraints of the film's ideological strategy will compel Lincoln to *choose not to choose*, either (see 13) by deciding to re-establish the balance between the two parties, or (see 14) by indefinitely postponing the choice, or even, in the trial, by positively refusing to decide, thus trying to save both brothers, be it at the risk of losing both; all things which label and confirm Lincoln as a unifier and not a divider.

(b) During the different stages of the trial, Lincoln appears successively 1. As the weigher of souls: he quickly estimates the moral value of the members of the jury (and he does this according to norms which escape common understanding, even conventional morality· he accepts a man who drinks, lynches, loafs about, because by admitting to these faults, he manifests his deeper honesty). 2. As entertainer of the crowd (jokes, little stories, etc . . .) which put him in contrast with the prosecutor, a starchy man of mean appearance. 3. As manifesting his castrating power over Cass, whom he immediately attacks without apparent reasons: intimidation, vicious interrogation, and totally displaced onomastic play on words, thundering looks: all these things imply a premonition of Cass's guilt on Lincoln's part, which is not backed up by any knowledge but is nonetheless the Truth. For throughout the film Lincoln relates not to knowledge, but to Truth (= Law). 4. As the spirit opposed to the word, the natural and/or divine Law to social Laws which are their more or less perfect transcription (he interrupts the prosecutor's cross-examination of the mother by telling him, "I may not know so much of Law, Mr. Prosecutor, but I know what's right and what's wrong"). 5. As the righteous against the corridor filibusterer, morality against politics (i.e., his political opponent Douglas's asides with the prosecutor and with Cass).

(c) But this first day of the trial ends in a defeat for Lincoln, brought about by a sensational development: Cass's second testimony From humanitarian concern, to save at least one of the two defendants, he goes back on the first evidence he gave, and claims to have been an eye-witness of the murder (thanks to the moonlight) and points out the murderer: the elder of the two brothers. In the hermeneutic chain ("which one has kil-

led?") this reversal of the situation introduces a deceptive answer A new question is thus posed: how will Lincoln sort this one out, not only to win the trial, but also to remain faithful to his refusal to choose?

21. THE NIGHT

(a) As before any "great crisis" in Hollywood cinema, there is a pause: the scene of the family vigil in the prison—whose function, in very classically codified form, is to instil a sense of expectancy allowing a dramatic resurgence. Here the demands of this code (tension-relaxation-tension) are precisely fulfilled. no information is given which makes the drama progress (the family's communion in song replacing/forbidding all explanatory dialogue); it is a "precarious situation lived through with serenity " But the lack of any allusion on the part of the other members of the family to the guilt of the elder brother is itself sufficient to ratify Cass's accusations against him, the fact that it is not questioned—as if it presented no problem—seems to authenticate it.

In the duration of the scene, its adherence to the code seems perfect and even excessive: the convention is accepted and pushed to its extreme by the Fordian inscription (for everything which delineates the family group in Ford is grafted here), even to bestowing its character of strangeness on the scene (static frame, scenes shot from the front, strong light-dark contrasts, position of the characters, choir). But this adherence on repeated reading is revealed to be a deception. When we know that the real culprit is neither of the brothers, the absence of any discussion between them or with their family has the effect of a real *coup de force* at the price of which the miraculous dimension of Lincoln's revelation of the Truth is made possible. The scene is thus regulated—with great skill—by *the necessity of making the code* (the waiting period in which the group communes in silence or song—when words are useless, even improper) *responsible for the censorship of any information* about the defendants' innocence. If the scene is silent, it is because anything that might be intimated would inevitably have lifted the deception from the enigma and ruined the magic of Lincoln's act.

(b) The second part of this night of vigil starts, concerning Lincoln, on the same model. the hero's solitude and meditation before the decisive test. Lincoln is in his rocking chair by his office window, playing the Jew's harp. This isolation signifying his defeat is strengthened by two events: 1. Douglas and Mary Todd go past his window in a carriage; they both look at him condescendingly; Mary Todd turns away and says to Douglas: "You were discussing your political plans Mr. Douglas, please go on." 2. The judge appears in Lincoln's office and, arguing from his long experience, suggests a double compromise: to get help the next day from a more experienced lawyer (he suggests Douglas) and to agree to plead guilty to save the other brother Lincoln categorically refuses: "I'm not the sort of fella who can just swap horses in the middle of the stream."

In 1. the change in size between the first long shot of the carriage and the close up when Mary Todd speaks, a trick of the direction which eliminates the "real" distance by changing the axis (high angle shot) and the width of the shot so that Lincoln appears to be right above the carriage, and Mary Todd's words cannot then fail to reach him, thanks to this unrealistic-proximity—compel the viewer to interpret them as being addressed not to Douglas (Lincoln's eternal contrast) but to Lincoln, and their political contents *standing* for an erotic content. "You were discussing your political plans Mr. Douglas, please go on" can be read as, "I couldn't possibly do so with you Lincoln, *nor make love*" at a time when everything in Mary Todd's behaviour, look, and gestures points to her obvious spite, and to her speech as a denial of her desire. In the film's other scenes the repression taking place alternately between the erotic and the political (Law as repressed desire and as natural/divine morality) becomes here, in a single sentence, the repression of the erotic by the political.

In 2. Lincoln's paranoid features are confirmed: his refusal of all help, of any compromise, his hallucinatory faith in his own power, his certainty of being Chosen, his rigidity, the holding out to the bitter end.

22. VICTORY

Second day of the trial. Lincoln calls the main prosecution witness, Cass, back to the witness box, and by his questions makes him *repeat* his statement of the previous day point by point: it was in fact thanks to the full moon that he was able to witness the scene; it is to save one of the two brothers that he has gone back on his first statement. Mary Todd, like the rest of the public doesn't see the point of Lincoln's insistence to have things which are already known repeated. Lincoln pretends to let Cass go again, and just as he is about to leave the well of the Court, he suddenly asks him, "What d'you have against Scrub White, what did you kill him for?" Pulling the almanac out of his hat he thrusts it forward, saying: "Look at page 12: see what it says about the moon; it says it was in it's first quarter and set at 10.21 p.m., forty minutes before the murder" and, addressing Cass, "You lied about this point, you lied about the rest." From this point onwards Lincoln harasses Cass with questions until, collapsing, in a broken, shrill voice, he confesses: "I didn't mean to kill him. . ." The confession obtained, Lincoln casually turns away from his victim and, addressing the prosecutor: "Your witness," while Cass's former supporters surround him threateningly

(a) The almanac: a *signifier* first present in the scenes where the mother asks Lincoln to write to her imprisoned sons for her (see 19) as a simple support for writing, reappears on the first day of the trial (where it is on Lincoln's table, near his hat), then in the night scene where Lincoln is fingering it with apparent casualness. It is finally produced as *sign* of the Truth at the end of the second day of the trial, when Lincoln pulls it out of his hat like a conjuror.

We have here the typical example of a signifier running through the film without a signified, representing nothing, acquiring the status of a sign under Lincoln's revelation (the almanac representing proof of the truth for everyone) *but without ever having been an indicator* Thus the thriller process of deduction is *completely eliminated* in favour of a scriptural logic which demands that such a signifier be produced as a veiled

term whose very concealment and sudden final revelation would constitute a *mise en scene* inseparable from the meaning it induces, the mark of the unconscious determination of its writing into Ford's text. Veiled, 1, in the extent to which it realises the operation of repression of (erotic/criminal) violence in the fiction, whose return is effected according to a rhetoric of negation, and, 2, because its only *place* is that of a term whose sole function is to effect a mediation (between the criminal and the crime, between the mother and the sons), it is thereby doomed to disappearance as it is produced and to be included/excluded from the propositions in which it is actualised, by the very fact that it determines the production of their meaning; this is so to the extent to which the *signifier* of truth must remain veiled as long as truth is not stated, since at no moment is it presented as a clue (which would imply a work, the exercise of a knowledge, even a manipulation, which is not the case here). Lincoln's powers are thus not presented as the exercise of the art of detective deduction, but as a paranoid interpretation which short-circuits its process. Thus the proof of the crime seems to be materialised by the mere faculty which Lincoln has of producing the signifier as the concrete result of his omnipotent powers of Revelation.

But the manifestation of this omnipotence at the end of the film, made necessary by the ideological project (Lincoln, a mythical hero representing Law and guarantor of Truth), takes place at the end of the series of relations of co-presence between Lincoln and the almanac (three scenes where it is present without Lincoln knowing what to do with it in terms of the truth) and in such an unlikely and arbitrary (magical) way that it can be read in the following ways: 1, effectively as omnipotence, 2, as a pure fictional *coup de force* implying an imposition of Ford's writing on Lincoln's character (Lincoln's omnipotence is then *controlled and limited* by Ford's omnipotence, the latter not adopting the best possible viewpoint on his character, which would have been to show him as himself having the revelation of the Truth, and not merely as its agent) and 3, as Lincoln's *impotence* insofar as he appears subject to the power of the signifier (the almanac) and in a position of radical non-recognition regarding it, such that one can just as

well say that the truth revolves around Lincoln (and not Lincoln around the truth) and that it is not Lincoln who uses the signifier to manifest the truth, but the signifier which uses Lincoln as mediator to accede to the status of the sign of truth. 2 and 3 (one specific to the film's writing, the other to its reading: but as we have stated in the introduction, we do not hesitate to force the text, even to rewrite it, insofar as the film only constitutes itself as a text by integration of the reader's knowledge) *manifest a distortion of the ideological project by the writing of the film.*

(b) Once the truth is revealed, Lincoln harasses Cass with brutal questions until he obtains his confession. 1. Lincoln must obtain from the culprit the confirmation of what he has just stated to be truth; on the one hand to finalise the fiction (save the two brothers, solve the mystery: but at the same time, this solution is the admission that the enigma was, in fact, a mere deception set up by the film); and on the other hand to be confirmed in the eyes of the other characters as possessor of the truth (if it is in fact enough for the spectator—who knows who Lincoln is—to see him reveal the truth to believe it, the characters of the fiction, his enemies, those who have witnessed his failure of the previous day, etc . cannot be so easily satisfied with his word). 2. Lincoln's insistence and violence at this moment can be read, first, as the classic harshness of rampant Justice, but mainly as the culmination of Lincoln's castrating power (see 16), which is attested by the fact that Cass, around whom the whole film has accumulated the clichés of hypervirility, collapses in tears when he confesses, crying like a child. 3. This excessive violence of the characterisation of Lincoln in the writing of the film, which is motivated neither by the needs of Lincoln's cause (he could triumph without terror) nor by those of the fiction (Cass could confess without resisting) shows an imbalance with the idealised figure of Lincoln: even if this violence in the writing implies no intentional criticism of the character Lincoln, it makes visible—by its own scriptural excesses—the truly repressive dimension of the figure which this writing dictates, and deroutes what could have been edifying or hagiographic in the ideological project of the film.

23. "TOWARDS HIS DESTINY"

After his victory, Lincoln leaves the court alone. Four people are waiting for him, among them Mary Todd and Douglas. She congratulates him, looking at him seductively. Douglas then comes to shake his hand. "I give you my sincere promise never to make the mistake of underrating you again." Lincoln replies, "Neither of us will underrate each other again." He is about to go but is called back, "The town's waiting." He moves towards the door, fully lit, and the crowd can be heard applauding off-set.

(a) Victorious, Lincoln is *recognised* by those who doubted him. this type of scene (recognition of the hero) belongs to a very classic register. But the way in which the scene is filmed, the camera at a slightly low angle shot, disposition of the groups, Lincoln's rather weary solemnity, the tone in which he is called ("the town's waiting") and, chiefly, when he goes to the threshold, his entry into a beam of violent light, the frontal low angle shot when he faces the crowd whom he greets by removing his hat, the very harsh lighting of the end of this scene, all set this sequence in a very specifically theatrical dimension: congratulations backstage after the performance, recall to the stage of the primadonna. But the fact that, by spatial displacement, this *encore* takes place not in the court in front of the spectators of the trial, but on another stage (the street, the town, the country) and in front of a crowd *which is not shown* (which is no longer only the inhabitants of Springfield but of America) retroactively shows the performance of the trial (definitely given as theatrical by the entrances, the recalls, the repeats, the attitude of the spectators, the wings, etc.) to be a simple rehearsal (provincial tour) and what is to follow on the other stage (which the whole film has played on as something having already happened which no one could be ignorant of) will be the real performance (national tour); and the *encore* is, in fact, the true entrance on the stage of the legend. At the moment when he is *discovered* (intercepted) by the others as Lincoln, and stripped of his character, he can only act it out, play his own role. This interception is very pre-

cisely indicated in the film by the violent call of the brilliant light: the reference to German expressionism (even to horror films: *Nosferatu*)—much admired by Ford, as we well know—is therefore compulsory at this point.

(b) Preceding the film's last shots which will only serve to heighten this tragic dimension, we have the scene of farewell to the Clays; like all other scenes with the family (as a function of its status in relation to Lincoln) it is treated in an intimate, familiar way, without solemnity A scene in which the fiction will terminate the double circuit of the symbolic debt linking Lincoln to Mrs. Clay and of the desire which drives Carrie Sue (as we have seen she is a substitute for Ann Rutledge) towards a Lincoln who can no longer love her; first the mother insists on paying Lincoln and gives him a few coins which he accepts, saying: "Thank you ma'am its mighty generous of you", then Carrie Sue leaps to his neck and kisses him, saying: "I reckon I'd just about die if I didn't kiss you Mr. Lincoln." This confirms everything in Carrie Sue's attitude, which already exceeded the simple feeling of gratitude towards Lincoln, showing her to be driven by the desire, which, throughout the film, makes her "play" around him, thus allowing her kiss to be read as a form of "acting out," a substitute for orgasm.

(c) Final scene: Lincoln takes leave of his companion (who is simultaneously a classic theatrical confidant and a sort of Sancho Panza, who is at his side in a number of scenes in the film) by telling him, "I think I might go on apiece . maybe to the top of that hill." The confidant goes out of frame. A storm threatens. Lincoln is slowly climbing the hill. A last shot shows him facing the camera, with a vacant look, while threatening clouds cross the background and the "Battle Hymn of the Republic" begins to be heard. Lincoln leaves the frame. Rain begins to fall violently and continues into the final shot of the film (his statue at the Capitol) while music intensifies.

Here again, it is the excesses of Ford's writing (accumulation of signs of the tragic, of ascent: hill—mythical reference—storm, lightning, rain, wind, thunder, etc.) which, by overlaying all the clichés, underlines the monstrous character of the figure of Lincoln: he leaves the frame and the film (like *Nosferatu*) as if it had become impossible for him to be filmed

any longer; *he is an intolerable figure,* not because he has become too big for any film on account of the ideological project but rather because the constraints and violences of Ford's writing have exploited this figure for their own ends and manifested its excessive and monstrous dimensions, have no further use for it and so return it to the museum.

24. WORK OF THE FILM

With the fiction reaching saturation point here, what culminates in the final sequence is nothing other than the effects of meaning, re-scanned by our reading through the film as a whole, taken to their extreme. That is: the unexpected results (which are also contrary in relation to the ideological project) produced by the inscription—rather than flat illustration—of this project within a cinematic texture and its treatment by a writing which, in order to carry through the project successfully, maximising its value *and only that* (it's obvious that Ford takes practically no distance in relation to the figure and the ideology of Lincoln), is led to: such distortions (the setting up of a system of deception), such omissions (all those scenes, necessary in the logic of the crime thriller but whose presence could have lessened the miraculous dimension of Lincoln's omnipotence: the confrontation with the accused, the least one could expect of a lawyer); such accentuations (the dramatisation of the final scenes); such scriptural violence (be it for the repression of violence—the lynching, the trial); such a systemisation of determination and election (throughout a film which, at the same time, wants to play on a certain suspense and free choice without which the fiction could neither develop nor capture interest); in short to such a *work* that, today, simply delimiting its operation and the series of means it puts into action allows us to see the price at which such a film could be made, the effort and detours demanded to carry the project through.

And which Jean-Pierre Oudart in the following conclusion, the point of departure of our study, cannot but repeat.

25. VIOLENCE AND LAW

I. A discourse on the Law produced in a society which can only represent it as the statement and practice of a moralist prohibition of all violence, Ford's film could only reassert all the idealist representations which have been given it. Thus it is not very difficult to extract from it an ideological statement which seems to valorise in all innocence the ascetic rigour of its agent, making it into the unalterable value which circulates throughout the film from scene to scene; it is also easy to observe that this cliché, presented as such in the film and systematically accentuated, is not there merely to ensure the acceptability of the Fordian inscription. Without this cliché which provides the fiction with a kind of metonymic continuity (the same constantly re-asserted figure)—whose necessity is moreover overdetermined, its function being more than simply setting up a character whose "idealism" can most conveniently be signified by the external signs of the very puritan sense of election—the film would appear, in fact does appear in spite of it, to be a text of disquieting unintelligibility; through its constant disconnections, it places us in a forced position for the reading and in fact its comprehension demands:

(1) That one first take no account of this at once insistent and fixed statement;

(2) That one listens carefully to what is stated in the succession of so obviously "Fordian" scenes which support this statement, and in the relations between the figures, all more or less part of the Fordian fiction, which constitute these scenes;

(3) That one tries to determine how all these are involved; i.e., to discover what the operation by which Ford inscribes this character into his fiction consists of, insofar as, despite appearances, it is not superimposed on Ford's "world," does not traverse it like a foreign body, but finds through this inscription into his fiction a designated place as representative of his Law; for the filmmaker promotes the character to the role to which his (legendary) historical referent destines him only at the price of his subjection to the (Fordian) fictional

logic. This determined his entry there in advance, insofar as his role was already written and his place already set out in Ford's fiction. The work of Ford's écriture only becomes apparent in this film through the problem involved in producing the character in this role, in that he took a place which was already occupied.

II. It is the character of the mother that incarnates the idealised figure of Ideal Law in Ford's fiction. Moreover, it is often, as in *Young Mr Lincoln*, the widowed mother, guardian of the deceased father's law. It is for her that the men (the regiment) sacrifice the cause of their desire, and under her presidency that the Fordian celebration takes place; this in fact consists in a simulacrum of sexual relations from which all effective desire is banned. But it is in the constantly renewed relationship of this group with another (the Indians), in the dualism of Ford's universe that the inscription of the structural imperative of Law which dictates the deferment of desire and imposes exchange and alliance is realised, in violence, guided by the mediating action of the hero (often a bastard) who is placed at its intersection.

III. In *Young Mr. Lincoln* one of the results of using a single character for both roles is that he will have both their functions, which will inevitably create, by their interference and their incompatibility (insofar as one secures the taboo on the violence of desire, the other is agent of its inscription), disturbances, actions which oppose the order of Ford's world, and it is remarkable that each comical effect always shows them up (there is no film in which laughter is so precisely a sign of a constant disorder of the universe). The compression of their functions will in fact be used only on the one level of the castration of the character (signified at the ideological level by its puritan cliché, and at the same time written, in the unconscious of the text, as the effect of the fictional logic on the structural determination of the character) and of his castrating action, in a fiction ruled by Ideal Law alone since the dualism of Ford's world is abandoned in favour of the mass-individual opposition. (In fact the political conflict intervenes only as a secondary determination of the fiction and literally only acts backstage.) In fact, we see that:

(1) The character's calling originates in his renouncing the pleasures of love; it is strengthened because he resists its attraction. Lincoln becomes so well integrated in the fiction and so vigilant against the violences and plots which take place there only because he refuses to give in to the advances constantly made to him by women, affected by a charm which is due only to the prestige of his castration.

(2). This extreme postponement of the hero's desire soon becomes meaningful since it permits him to become the restorer of Ideal Law, whose order has been perturbed by a crime which the Mother has not been able to prevent but which she will attempt to stifle.

This shows that:

(1). The puritan cliché which Ford emphasises has the very precise function of promoting the character to his role as mediator, insofar as the pleasure which he rejects allows him to thwart any attempt at sexual and political corruption; it thus simultaneously guarantees the credibility of the figure of Lincoln and the position of the character as the figure of Ideal Law in Ford's fiction. At the obvious price of installing him within a castration, whose comical aspects Ford uses sufficiently to indicate how indifferent he is to producing an edifying figure, and how much more attentive he is to the disturbing results of its presence in the fiction: for example, in the dance scene in which his character perturbs the harmony, where the agent of Law behaves like a kill-joy, thus making visible what the harmony of the Fordian celebration would conceal.

(2). The fact that the character literally takes the place of the Mother, i.e., takes on simultaneously her ideal position and her function (since he assumes responsibility for her children, and promises to feed them well in the new home which the prison becomes), gives rise to a curious transformation of the figure, as this repetition of roles is effected under the sign of a secret which the Mother must (believes she does) keep to try to prevent any violence—even, inconceivably, that of the Ideal Law which she incarnates—against her children; and by thus incubating the crime she projects her role into a quasi erotic (almost Hitchcockian) dimension never presented as such by Ford, since usually the fiction protects her from any rela-

tionship with the crime (since it is part of her function to be ignorant of violence). This is comically reintroduced in the final scene of the trial, when the real proof (an almanac on a sheet of which should have been written the letter of love which Lincoln was planning to write for her, only to lull her attention and extract confessions from her) is pulled out of Lincoln's hat; it was necessary for the re-establishment of Law that by the end of the trial a signifier (the proof of the crime) be produced whose very occultation renders it erotic; and that it must necessarily be produced by the figure of Law to fit into the fictional logic since it is from this ideal Law that originated the cancellation of the criminal act in the fiction, the statement of the taboo on violence (on pleasure), the position of the Mother as the figure of forbidden violence (pleasure), the possession of the phallus by this figure (as a signifier of this pleasure) and the production of the proof of the crime as if it were a phallic signifier obviously proceeding from the same statement. In such fictions this usually means, either that the weapon, the trace of the crime, acts like a letter which Law must decipher, since its very proscription has written it, or that the confession be produced by the criminal as a return of the repressed in an erotic form. The two results are here compressed, Law producing the proof of the crime (the writing which reveals the murderer) as if it were a phallic object which Ford's comedy presents like the rabbit pulled out of the conjuror's hat; the improbable levity with which Ford brings the trial to its close really can only be read as a masking effect which conceals to the end the "human" context, thus allowing the logic of the inscription to produce this gag as its ultimate effect, a final consequence of Lincoln's re-enactment of the Mother's role, a fantastic return of the mask.

IV. The fact that the overdetermination of this inscription of the Lincoln figure, as agent of the Law, in Ford's fiction by all the idealised representations of Law and its effects produced by the bourgeoisie, far from having been erased by Ford, has been declared by his writing and emphasised by his comedy, shows what a strange ideological balancing act the filmmaker has insisted on performing, and what strange scriptural incongruities he has insisted on exploiting; to the extent that by the

fictional constraints he gave himself, by giving up the usual bisection of his fiction and the sometimes truly epic inscription of Law thereby articulated (which recalls Eisenstein in *The General Line*) he could only produce the Law as a pure prohibition of violence, whose result is only a permanent indictment of the castrating effects of its discourse. Indeed to what is the action of his character reduced if not hitting his opponents at their weakest point—weaknesses which Ford always perversely presents as being capable of provoking a deadly laughter? So that the sole but extreme violence of the film consists of verbal repression of violence which, in certain scenes (the unsuccessful lynching) is indicated as really being a death sentence, a mortal interdict which has no equivalent except maybe in Lang, and which shows the distance Ford, or rather his writing, keeps between himself and the idealist propositions which he uses.

V. For, with a kind of absolute indifference to the reception given to his stylistic effects, the filmmaker ends by practising stubbornly a scriptural perversion, which is implied by the fact that, paradoxically, in a film meant to be the Apology of the Word, the last word is always given to the iconic signifier, entrusted by Ford with the production of the determining effects of meaning. And as in this film what is to be signified is always either the (erotic, social, ideological) separation of the hero relative to his surroundings, or the immeasurable distance between him and his actions, or the absence of any common denominator between the results he obtains and the means he uses, and those obtained by his opponents (insofar as he holds the privilege of the castrating speech), Ford succeeds, by the economy of means which he uses to that effect—his style forbidding him the use of effects of implicit valorisation of the character, which he could have drawn from an "interiorised" writing—in simultaneously producing the same signifier in completely different statements: (for example, in the moonlight scene, where the moonlight on the river indicates, at the same time, the attempted seduction, the past idyll, and the hero's "idealist" vocation), or even in renewing the same effect of meaning in totally different contexts (the same spatial disconnections of the character used in the dance

scene and the murder scene). So that the intention of always making sense, of closing the door to any implicit effect of meaning, of constantly re-asserting these same meanings, in fact results—since to produce them the filmmaker always actualises the same signifiers, sets up the same stylistic effects—in constantly undermining them, turning them into parodies of themselves. (With Ford parody always proceeds from a denunciation of the writing by its own effects.) The film's ideological project thus finds itself led astray by the worst means it could have been given to realise itself (Ford's style, the inflexible logic of his fiction), mainly to the benefit of a properly scriptural projection (obtained not by the valorisation after the event of previously constituted effects of meaning, but proceeding directly from the inscription, produced anew and resolved in each scene, of the character in Ford's fiction), of the effects of the repression of violence: a violence whose repression, written thus, turns into exorcism and gives to its signifiers, in the murder and the lynching scenes, a fantastic contrast which contributes considerably to the subversion of the deceptively calm surface of the text.

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