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Joseph Malham's *John Ford: Poet in the Desert* ... is an intimate, passionate portrait of a troubled cinematic genius. Malham re-tells the story of our American Shakespeare, a superb visual storyteller and mythmaker. A fellow Catholic, he's especially good at delineating the role of Ford's faith and Irish roots in the director's classic portrayals of families, communities and history.

—Glenn Frankel, author of *The Searchers: The Making of an American Legend*, *True West* magazine

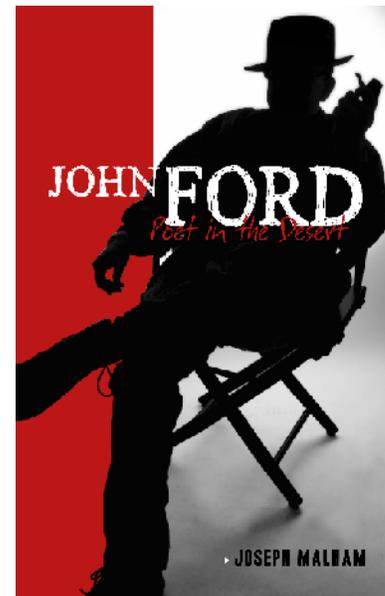
JOHN FORD: POET IN THE DESERT

An Uncommon Biography of the Legendary Director

Author Joe Malham offers rarely explored facets of the dark yet towering poetic genius in a fascinating analysis of the artist's personal life. The influences on Ford's work, from art, history and politics to the man's mystical faith, are skillfully woven together with insights into Ford's famous films.

Ford, who won six Oscars, is known primarily for Westerns, such as *The Searchers* or *She Wore a Yellow Ribbon*. Yet in movies like *The Grapes of Wrath*, *How Green Was My Valley*, and *The Quiet Man*, Ford created timeless classics as he explored the role of myth, history, tradition and war in epic dramas of the individual, the family and community. This biography reveals how Ford's work ranged over the vast and textured richness of the human experience.

Despite the handicap of his poor eyesight, he always understood the delicate alchemical balance between geometry and artistry that transmuted an average shot into cinematic gold, and he dives to it like an eagle swooping in on his prey from high above. After a sotto voce conference with his cinematographer he steps over and adjusts the brim of John Wayne's trooper slouch, Victor McLaglen's non-com kepi or, for a laugh, the spacious seat of Ward Bond's pants. Details of no apparent consequence to anyone, but to the consummate artist they are the individual parts that when put together make for a lyrical and poetic entirety.



About the Author



JOSEPH MALHAM is an iconographer and writer who studied art in Rome through Loyola University's Rome Center. He graduated from Loyola with a BA in History. An artist-in-residence at St. Gregory the Great Church in Chicago, he lectures frequently on religious art. Mr. Malham's panels and icon banners have been acquired by churches, institutions and individuals around the country. His first book, *By Fire into Light: Four Catholic Martyrs of the Nazi Camps*, tells the stories of four heroic figures who transcended the horrors of persecution during the Second World War.

To learn more about Joseph Malham, visit www.JosephMalham.com.

ORDERING INFORMATION

John Ford: Poet in the Desert

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Retail & online booksellers

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Malham offers a highly readable account of Ford's life and career in this new biography...Malham indeed tells a good story and shares some intriguing insights into the internal and external forces that shaped Ford's work.

—Library Journal



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John Ford: Poet in the Desert ***Q&A with author Joseph M. Malham***

Q: What was it that attracted you to the subject of John Ford?

A: Actually, my on-ramp was John Wayne. As a kid I was in love with the Duke and spent nearly four years flunking high school so I could watch John Wayne films, read books about John Wayne and even had a several-year running correspondence with him. It was only later that I picked up the thread that it was Ford who helped shape Wayne's heroic persona and gave him his most memorable roles. Without Ford, Wayne would have been just another good B-Cowboy actor instead of the legend he became. That was Ford's ethos.

Q: What did you hope to explore in your book that had not been done in previous Ford bios?

A: I make it quite clear from the start that I am not writing an academic or exhaustively researched biography of Ford. What I hoped to do was to examine Ford's life and work through the lens of the people and things that influenced him. Namely, this would be history, art, politics, mythology and people both historical and contemporary who affected him and, in the latter, who he affected.

Q: Why the subtitle *Poet in the Desert*?

A: First, because Ford is so readily identified with Monument Valley, the unspeakably awesome Arizona locale where he filmed so many of his classic Westerns. In a deeper sense, it speaks to Ford's sense of artistry which by its nature entails a certain loneliness, isolation and solitude. That is the essential ingredient of any great artist and Ford embodied those qualities personally and manifested themselves in his works.

Q: What are some of the dominant themes in Ford's films that make them classics?

A: The dominant that run through almost all his mature works are ones which not only define individuals, but their actions and choices that influence a greater segment of humanity. Thus, his recurring leitmotifs such as history, myth, the military, honor, duty, community, sacrifice and love.

Q: What about faith?

A: Ford was a Catholic but was not a director who made Catholic films about priests, nuns, the Church or Scripture. On the contrary he was an artist who made films that resonated with deeply mystical themes that speak of a profound connection with God and the cycles of life that make up the patterns of existence. These include rituals such as births, marriages and deaths as well as liturgy, hierarchy and a richly textured connection with the earth itself.

Q: What makes his Westerns so great?

A: Most Westerns deal simply with cowboys, homesteaders, Indians and shoot 'em ups. Ford framed his Western characters in situations that dealt with inner conflict and outer choices which resulted in his making the Cowboy an American original on par with the other great figures in world myth such as the Spartan Warrior, the Medieval Knight, the Viking and the Samurai. He made the Cowboy, for ill or for good, America's very own mythological calling card.

Q: Much has been said about Ford's irascible, almost brutal, behavior. Was this true?

A: Ford was a very troubled and fragile man. He was an alcoholic whose meanness was part theater, part real, but actually masked a deeply sensitive and gentle soul. Much of his facade was to protect that artistic sensitivity and prove his manhood, but most of the time it was the result of the poet who traditionally sees himself as outsider and loner and unable to articulate his inner vision.

Q: How did Ford's Irish heritage affect his filmmaking?

A: Ford strongly identified with and was greatly proud of his Irish heritage. His parents came from Ireland and in both his work and his personal life he saw in the Irish people the themes of oppression, resilience, politics and justice, faith and, most important, the bonds of family and community as the barriers between them and a hostile world. Ford was a sentimental Irishman but his sentiment was always integrated into larger themes of communities moving through time but dealing with serious issues. This is seen in *The Quiet Man*, his most famous "Irish" film, but in all his Irish films as well.

Q: What are your favorite Ford films?

A: Like Ford himself, my list changes with my mood. On the top shelf would be *Stagecoach*, *How Green Was My Valley*, *They Were Expendable*, *The Searchers* and *The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance*. Not only because they deal with the aforementioned themes such as community, honor, duty, the inevitable disintegration of family and redemption but also because they simply good movies that, like great novels or great music, continually offer something new and deep with every engagement.

Q: Do you think you have solved the "mystery" of John Ford?

A: No, and frankly, not only is that impossible but also because that is nobody's business but his. Mystery is what gives the work of any great artist its timelessness and beauty. Solve the mystery of any great work of art and you rob it of its magnificence. Like faith itself, it is better always to rest in the mystery than to solve it.





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Acclaim for John Ford: Poet in the Desert

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—Glenn Frankel, author of *The Searchers: The Making of an American Legend*, True West magazine

John Ford Malham's treatment of this giant in the industry is a tour de force. His breadth of knowledge of Ford's extensive achievements, both the great and the not so laudable, is impressive... Whether one is a veteran aficionado of Ford's life and work, or a novice in the history of 20th century film classics, - do yourself a favor and take up *John Ford, Poet of the Desert*

—Fr. J. Philip Horrigan, D. Min., writer and Liturgical Design Consultant

Malham offers a highly readable account of Ford's life and career in this new biography...Malham indeed tells a good story and shares some intriguing insights into the internal and external forces that shaped Ford's work.

—Library Journal,

In *John Ford: Poet in the Desert*, the reader learns of a 20th century film auteur who led a creative life of great deliberation and planning. Ford's films of personal intent and preference are analyzed with the same aplomb as the movies or programmers that Ford made for an allowance of time and money to direct. Not satisfied with oeuvre highlights, Malham is a completionist. He examines with synoptic intent of both criticality and pleasure all of the extant Ford films

—Dan Sutherland, Faculty, Film & Video Department, Columbia College Chicago

"This book is long overdue and hopefully will put Ford in a proper light as a man of great faith, sensitivity and genius - an immortal symbol of how culture can be lifted through truth, beauty, and goodness."

—Fr. Don Woznicki, Founder & Executive Director of *New Ethos* and Project Leader of *The Hollywood Project*