

Reading Homework

Wayne & Clift / Dunson & Matt

The part of Mathew Garth was played by Montgomery Clift in his first starring role. Clift was part of a new generation of post war actors whose methods differed greatly from the previous generation to which John Wayne belonged. Clift was not just some pretty boy the studio tossed in the movie to stand there while Wayne dominated the film.



Montgomery Clift (1920-1966)

Clift was a very experienced theater actor having first appeared on Broadway at the age of fifteen. Much like the character he plays, Clift was willing and able to stand up to both Wayne's acting and his personality. It was not that the two leading men disliked each other, but that they simply came from very different backgrounds and generations. John Wayne knew how to play only one character; himself. On the other hand, Montgomery Clift was capable of playing almost any type of character, although because he was so handsome, he was



usually cast as a romantic leading man in his early years. Throughout *Red River*, Wayne and Clift compete for the attention of the audience. Wayne is bigger than life as he bullies his way through the film, while Clift is calm and cool throughout the film, never gets angry, never shouts and never overacts. Clift does not steal the movie from John Wayne, but this first-time film actor more than holds his own. The film is about the intense relationship the characters have, and that was clearly helped by their rivalry as actors. But as I will reveal in my final lecture, what really made the dynamic between the two actors intriguing was the fact that they had *completely* different ideas about what the relationship between their characters was.

The *Obvious* Interpretation of the Relationship Between Matt and Dunson: Father and Son

Stagecoach and *Red River* both star John Wayne, yet The Ringo Kid and Thomas Dunson could not be more different in most ways. However, there is one key similarity between the two. Towards the end of each film both are motivated by an almost obsessive need for revenge. In *Stagecoach*, Ringo is the loyal son who is avenging his father's murder, while in *Red River*, Dunson is the father figure determined to take revenge

on the “son” who defied him. Throughout *Stagecoach* no one questions Ringo’s right to take revenge for the murder of his father (and brother), but in *Red River*, absolutely no one believes that Dunson has the right to kill Matt. We in the audience understand what everyone in the film understands, that even though Matt has taken control over the cattle drive and the herd, he is still intensely loyal to Tom.

Matt stopped Tom from doing a terrible thing by hanging the two men, but this must have been a very difficult thing for Matt to do because he has obeyed Tom since he was fourteen years old. This is more than Matt just standing up for those men, it is also Matt standing up for himself. A son owes his father loyalty and obedience in every culture in the world, but in every culture in the world *boys have to grow up* and become men, men who can make decisions for themselves and who understand the difference between right and wrong. It is a lot easier to be a boy than it is to be a man. Boys just have to do what they are told to do, while a man has an obligation to “think for himself”. That was what Matt told Tom, isn’t it? He said “Don’t tell me what to think”.

Exactly. Adults think for themselves.

Matt is in the worst kind of dilemma; as a loyal “son” he wants to obey Tom, but as a man of conscience who knows the difference between right and wrong, he cannot. In the moment when Matt defies Tom, he achieves his independence and has become “his own man” as we say in English. All the other men immediately accept him as their leader because they know he will lead them wisely and well.

A son owes his father loyalty and obedience, but a father owes something to his son. A father must set a good example for his son. No one wants a son to follow the example of an evil father. Moreover, a father also owes his son a chance to become an independent man. It is the normal course of things for fathers

and sons to come into conflict as the son establishes himself as a man. A good father accepts this and the relationship matures into a relationship between adults.

What I have just written is, I believe, perfectly true of the relationship between fathers and sons and it applies to Tom and Matt. But we should not forget something; Tom and Matt are *not* really father and son. In many ways they are like a father and son, but there is something else about their relationship that we will discuss in the final lecture. But, why don't you think about it and try to figure it out before I tell you? What was the *real* relationship between Tom and Matt?

