

Clint Eastwood and his Performance in *The Bridges Of Madison County* as a Precursor to the New Masculinity: The Close-Up of Robert Kincaid in the Rain

Clint Eastwood et sa performance dans *The Bridges Of Madison County* comme un précurseur de la nouvelle masculinité : le gros plan de Robert Kincaid sous la pluie

Antonio Cantos Ceballos

Volume 30, numéro 3, printemps 2024

Cinélekta 9

URI : <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1111120ar>

DOI : <https://doi.org/10.7202/1111120ar>

[Aller au sommaire du numéro](#)

Éditeur(s)

Cinémas

ISSN

1181-6945 (imprimé)

1705-6500 (numérique)

[Découvrir la revue](#)

Citer cet article

Cantos Ceballos, A. (2024). Clint Eastwood and his Performance in *The Bridges Of Madison County* as a Precursor to the New Masculinity: The Close-Up of Robert Kincaid in the Rain. *Cinémas*, 30(3), 59–75.
<https://doi.org/10.7202/1111120ar>

Résumé de l'article

Cet article vise à expliquer comment Clint Eastwood construit le personnage masculin principal, Robert Kincaid, dans son film *The Bridges of Madison County* (1995) comme un précurseur manifeste de la nouvelle masculinité et, par conséquent, comment il permet au spectateur de se connecter avec lui (et avec l'histoire) sur le plan émotionnel. Cet homme sensible est particulièrement visible dans une scène mémorable presque à la fin du film, dans laquelle prévaut l'allure minimaliste du personnage, lorsque, sous une pluie battante, il se dirige vers Francesca (Meryl Streep) qui est assise, et qui reste assise, dans le camion de son mari. Cette scène est l'une des plus audacieuses de la carrière d'Eastwood, car Kincaid est littéralement détrempé par la pluie, épuisé émotionnellement, et tout glamour a définitivement été effacé de son image. En appliquant à son analyse la méthode analytique de nature qualitative et interprétative, cet article expliquera comment, afin d'atteindre cette fragilité et cette sensibilité (attributs culturellement féminins), la performance d'Eastwood dépasse les limites du scénario pour explorer le domaine des émotions comme une manière efficace de donner richesse et profondeur au personnage, l'amenant inévitablement à découvrir ce qu'il ressent vraiment pour quelqu'un, en l'occurrence sa bien-aimée Francesca.

Clint Eastwood and his Performance in *The Bridges Of Madison County* as a Precursor to the New Masculinity: The Close-Up of Robert Kincaid in the Rain

Antonio Cantos Ceballos
University of Málaga (Spain)

ABSTRACT

This article aims to explain how Clint Eastwood constructs his main male character in his film *The Bridges of Madison County* (1995), Robert Kincaid, as a clear precursor of the new masculinity and, therefore, how he enables the viewer to connect with him (and the story) on an emotional level. This *feeling man* is particularly visible in a memorable scene almost at the end of the film, in which the minimalist look of the character prevails, when, in the pouring rain, he walks towards Francesca (Meryl Streep), who is sitting and who remains seated, in her husband's truck. This scene is one of the most daring of Eastwood's career, as Kincaid is literally drenched in rain, emotionally drained and all glamour has definitely been washed out of his image. Applying the analytical method of a qualitative and interpretative nature to its analysis, this article will explain how, in order to achieve this fragility and sensitivity (culturally feminine attributes), Eastwood's performance goes beyond the confines of the script to explore the realm of emotions as an effective way of giving richness and depth to the character, leading him inevitably to discover what he really feels for someone, in this case his beloved Francesca.

Clint Eastwood is one of the last classic actor-directors whose natural tendency has been to repeat a certain type of story and dramatic approach using different formats and viewpoints (Guerif 1987, 29-31). In this sense, following figures as relevant and varied in the history of cinema as John Ford, Ingmar Bergman, Michelangelo Antonioni, Jim Jarmusch and Woody Allen, he has been able, in this case, to revolutionize the genre of classical melodrama,

orchestrating the fantasies and enjoyment of spectators to transform them into individuals with the capacity for expression (Pezzotta 2007; Engel 2007; Bingham 2011). In his film *The Bridges of Madison County* (1995) he uses scenic and interpretative directing resources that endow his work with modern touches, to the point of revitalizing the genre. These resources focus on the study and characterization of its two lead actors: the attractive, fragile masculinity of Robert Kincaid (Clint Eastwood) and the strong, determined character of Francesca Johnson (Meryl Streep). The film is not only a melodrama in the tradition of classical Hollywood (Douglas Sirk); Eastwood also extends the melodrama to the principal male character, the photographer Kincaid, combining the *feeling man* with the women's film. In this way, Eastwood, as a committed actor, builds his male lead character from the fragility and sensitivity that he never hides (culturally feminine attributes) and combines with the independent and adventurous spirit of the protagonist. The result is an attractive and very powerful male character, a clear precursor of the new masculinity.

Many film critics (McCarthy 1995; Felperin 1995; Travers 1995; Pawelczak 1995) label Eastwood a "classical filmmaker" and base their argument particularly on the filmmaker's careful way of composing the love scenes in *The Bridges of Madison County*, wisely blending romanticism with minimalism in a slow and gradual manner throughout the film. Analysing Eastwood's close-up in which Kincaid, drenched by rain, looks at Francesca sitting in her husband's truck, is the main objective of the present text, a task undertaken with as its general methodological principle that of gauging the distance of the gaze imposed by the filmmaker-actor. To do so, I will focus on analysing this highly significant fragment in the film, with special emphasis on the details that constitute the close-up. This involves a clear commitment to the analytical method described by David Bordwell (1995), correlating textual unity with semantic features and articulating an argument that demonstrates the innovation and validity of the acting, together with criteria based also on the composition of the film's characters through the direction of actors, in this case in keeping with Konstantin Stanislavski's method of film acting based on two basic pillars: the backstory and the follow through.

In this regard, I will focus in particular on analysing the personification and presentation of the specific character of Kincaid, delving into the whole person (his identity and physical features) and also on the character's behaviour; that is, how his conduct develops during the relationship he builds with the female character of Francesca, all of which produces a series of features that personify him and lead to this emblematic close-up.

The Legacy of Sergio Leone and Don Siegel: Close-ups as a Constant Feature of Eastwood's Films

Working with close-ups is a constant feature in Eastwood's career (Engel 2012; Sterrit 2014), which, as he mentions on numerous occasions, has been influenced by his two great teachers: Sergio Leone and his Dollar trilogy (*A Fistful of Dollars* [*Per un pugno di dollari*], 1964; *For a Few Dollars More* [*Per qualche dollaro in più*], 1965; *The Good, the Bad and the Ugly* [*Il buono, il brutto, il cattivo*], 1966); and Don Siegel (*Dirty Harry*, 1971). But it was Don Siegel especially who taught him to focus on the male character: Inspector Harry Callahan. Unlike the simple cinematic silhouettes of characters like the Man with No Name (*A Fistful of Dollars*, *For a Few Dollars More*), or Blondie (*The Good, the Bad and the Ugly*), Siegel's Harry Callahan is characterised by both depth and anxiety, as perfectly defined by Bernard Benoliel:

He is a loner, in the throes of grief and melancholic bitterness, which he tries to heal through action . . . an insomniac with no fixed abode, who spends his time on the street. In a scene that foreshadows the behaviour of the character Travis Bickle in Martin Scorsese's *Taxi Driver* (1976), he lets loose a paranoid diatribe against the world. He is a man whose only sexual gratification seems to be verbal and physical expression of violence and he has it in for the whole universe (and himself) because of the accidental death of his wife. (Benoliel 2010, 22)

Don Siegel worked on the Harry Callahan character using a filming technique which placed great importance on eye-level takes of the lead actor, in shots that emphasized and prioritized the character's torso and head and to which he also added a photo-effect, giving him an extra dose of strength and solidity, as Paul Smith highlights:

If the Leone movies presented Eastwood's face and body as a kind of tabula rasa onto which the spectator reads nothing but inscrutability, Siegel adds other elements and thickens out somewhat that photo-effect of Eastwood. What he offers is no longer a tabula rasa; he adds an internal element to the face that the spectator is called upon to interpret. This internalization of the character's emotion usually promotes a sense of his strength and solidity (that, as much the pent-up aggressivity [sic] of Eastwood's face, is the fundamental preferred point of identification with the Eastwood image). (Smith 1993, 215)

Eastwood, through his work with Don Siegel, who he greatly admired, learned to perfect the image of inscrutability, which the clean slate of the Man with No Name had given him in Sergio Leone's films, whilst adding an internal element that gave him a particular emotion with which he fascinated viewers in films such as *The Beguiled* (Don Siegel, 1971), *Dirty Harry* (Don Siegel, 1971), *Magnum Force* (Ted Post, 1973), *Thunderbolt and Lightfoot* (Michael Cimino, 1974) and *The Enforcer* (James Fargo, 1976).

At the same time, we should note that, as a filmmaker, Eastwood has always used many medium shots of two or more characters, and in his most classic films has relatively often used the shot/reverse shot composition. Through the two techniques mentioned above, the male torso and face, and especially the latter, become of central importance in almost all his films. Thus while classic scenes of shot/reverse shot in foreshortened frames divide the viewer's attention and lead to close-ups of, for instance, the male and female stars, Eastwood's technique tends to focus more on the male subject, who generally becomes the centre of our visual field and enables the viewer simply to contemplate the male hero's always inscrutable face and/or torso. That is, he is almost expressionless, and makes gestures only minimally related to the actions or gestures of others; these gestures therefore become more internal, directed towards an apparent mystery, the faithful reflection of an introverted character, rounded off by his unmoving, lined, trademark face, an outstanding feature of his roles in *High Plains Drifter* (1973), *The Outlaw Josey Wales* (1976) and *Pale Rider* (1985). Following on from his films *White Hunter*, *Black Heart* (1990) and, more specifically, his Oscar-winning western *Unforgiven* (1992), Eastwood developed his

directing/acting work with close-ups and learned to play with what Gilles Deleuze calls “reflected unity,” or the ability to give emotion and movement to the character’s face (Deleuze 1989, 216). The climax of this evolution was the close-ups of himself performing in his film *The Bridges of Madison County* (1995), where the close-up scenes of Kincaid suggest an overwhelming desire and intensity which endow the character with an extraordinary tenderness as a man of genuine feelings—an image, in short, which is clearly a harbinger of the new masculinity.

Robert Kincaid’s Character as the Archetype of the New Masculinity: A Real *Feeling Man* in Melodrama

The storyline of Eastwood’s *The Bridges of Madison County* is that of a romance between two middle-aged people, who have already lived a large part of their lives, but who still have aspirations, on hold, deep in their hearts. The lead male character, Kincaid, a photographer for *National Geographic*, has been sent to Iowa to take photographs of some famous covered bridges that give the film its name: *The Bridges of Madison County*. It is here, in this emblematic place, that he meets Francesca, a housewife enjoying a few days alone while her husband and two children are away taking part in a cattle competition.

In this general context of the plot, a particularly notable scene near the end of the film stands out, in which the minimalist look of Kincaid prevails, when, in the pouring rain, he walks towards Francesca, who is sitting and who remains seated, in her husband’s truck. This scene is one of the most daring of Eastwood’s career, as Kincaid is literally drenched in rain, emotionally drained and all glamour has definitely been washed out of his image (Carlson 2002, 83). This close-up image of Kincaid constitutes a desperate request for love that is not reciprocated, and a separation the two know is definitive, and whose purpose is to move the audience. Eastwood conveys through Kincaid the image of a new masculinity, a man with feelings who also displays an independent and adventurous spirit.

When the spectator reaches that scene in the film, the sensation one normally gets is that the scene began long before, at the beginning of the film where it was glimpsed in latent form. Indeed, it is

this tension accumulated throughout the film that is alone responsible for producing an emotional overload in viewers, bringing them to the edge of tears when watching this close-up of Kincaid in the rain. This use of a hidden set-up is based on the work done on the characterisation of the role, developed in a slow, deliberate way through a series of meetings between the two main characters, Kincaid and Francesca. Thus, we see them chat amicably in several scenes, mainly in Francesca's kitchen, where Kincaid talks about his experiences in Africa, offers to help to make dinner, dances with her or simply tunes the radio to a station playing soft jazz music. The image of this close-up was created by fundamentally combining two aspects: the fact that Kincaid is not the traditional sort of man, like Francesca's husband, Richard (Jim Haynie), or their son, Michael (Victor Slezak); and, second, that Kincaid, as a skilled photographer, is able to see the beauty of the ordinary, of reality as it is, of Iowa, of the bridges and of Francesca. Therefore, the transgressive discourse Eastwood invests in the character of Francesca is decisive, giving her a power distilled from her own point of view on events and, in addition, the attribute of a non-self-destructive melancholy, contrary to the norm in classic Hollywood melodramas (Walker 1982; Thomas 2000; Williams 2001). This was highlighted in a narrative not exempt from comic moments that asks the viewer to question traditional patriarchal power and an exclusively masculine perspective of history. As Eastwood comments in an interview reproduced by Coblenz and Kapsis, "We preferred to tell the story through the woman's point of view, Francesca's. And we simplified considerably the protagonists and their aspirations" (2012, 175). In this sense, Eastwood rounds off and enriches Kincaid, who goes beyond the legendary western hero (Combs 1996), with a fragility and "feminine" anxiety that makes such masculine power even more attractive: the male protagonist is portrayed as a true artist of life, an art that requires sensitivity, a special attitude and education to be able to enjoy life in a relaxed way, to devote time to unhurried conversation and, in the end, to discover and appreciate the value of others. By means of endowing the adventurer-photographer-lover with feminine attributes, Eastwood manages to round off his character, revitalizing the individualistic and simpler lead actor of westerns (Neibaur 2015; Chirica 2018) and transforming him into a new

feeling man, prototype of the new masculinity and, in short, heir to a whole melodramatic substrate of films which construed sentiment as the most authentic expression of men—melodramatic texts that were revived in the 1990s and referred to as *male melodramas* (Boscagli 1993; Bingham 1994; Van Fuqua 1996): *Regarding Henry* (Mike Nichols, 1991), *Dying Young* (Joel Schumacher, 1991), *Fearless* (Peter Weir, 1993) and *Shadowlands* (Richard Attenborough, 1993).

Unlike the sensitive lead men we describe above, however, Eastwood creates a more rounded character of greater complexity thanks to the counterpoint and response offered in the role of Francesca, which goes beyond the archetype of the classic melodramatic female part reserved for women in films (Doane 1987), described by Drucilla Cornell as “a crisis of femininity that precludes a woman’s self-assertion outside of the fulfilling of the masculinity fantasy” (2009, 92). In fact, Eastwood is able to transcend the original over-sentimental story by Robert James Waller and create a romance in its purest form, with an attractive and completely transgressive character, because the filmmaker grants Francesca power: we see the unfolding of events from her viewpoint, not Kincaid’s. Her melancholy is reflected in the diary her children read and is the result of a narrative, and the moments of comedy she brings to some scenes show her clear opposition to patriarchal power.

The result of all this is the creation of an attractive male lead character: Robert Kincaid, a man who is capable of searching for and devoting all the time necessary to finding the most authentic in others while, in return, revealing his most authentic self to us. Kincaid is someone who can accept change as an inherent part of life and rejects imposed morality, because he defends his freedom and gives on the whole the impression of a natural and uncomplicated masculinity. At the same time, however, he is in a constant state of anxiety about the possible consequences of his relationship with Francesca. Therefore, the strength of this close-up is fruit of the sum and mixture of all the attributes Eastwood brought to this work, adapted to the need for a new hero of romantic melodrama marked by the desire for individuality and the freedom to go against the current, qualities the filmmaker notes are akin to his own personality:

I think that in every man's head there is a dream of behaving like a free individual, which is increasingly difficult to achieve. ... To some people I represent an individual in danger of extinction in our society. I see that there is a cry for individuality. I see that due to our intellect we humans have got stuck in such nonsense that we have made life much more complicated than it should be. (Knapp 1996, 18)

The Keys to the Construction of the Close-up of Robert Kincaid in the Rain: Training One's Listening and Working the Backstory with the Follow Through

An actor's work in a close-up is in the eyes. An actor's task must be to imagine the character in this small space created by the camera (the close-up), where each particular fragment (an eye, the nose), has extreme importance. Indeed, in order to seduce with the eyes, the actor needs great powers of concentration since the camera lens amplifies his actions and he is forced to reduce the scale of the action without reducing its intensity as the camera gets closer. The mind has to work even harder in close-ups than in other shots, as here the performance is solely in the eyes and the rest of the body cannot be used to transmit emotions.

Eastwood knows perfectly well that the best moments of a character in close-up are those in which his lips are not moving at all, in which he is listening to the other actor and is affected by everything around him at that moment. For in cinema it is often the case that the most interesting close-up is not that of the actor who speaks, but that of the actor who listens. In this sense, training to improve one's listening, "hearing" everything that happens around you, was a priority in Eastwood's work with his character Kincaid. By *listening* I refer to an active process that involves mobilising the five senses to respond to a stimulus in the scene; thus the meaning of the dialogue is reinforced by everything else the actor perceives: a headache, heat or cold, the other actor's feelings and mood, their smell, the way they walk or how they sit, etc. When actors truly listen, they "hear" all that is possible to hear, everything they "listen to" affects them to some extent and they react to each stimulus. The actor Morgan Freeman underscored this after his success in Frank Darabont's film *The Shawshank Redemption* (2002) in an interview

for the *Los Angeles Times*: “Most of acting is reacting, and you only react if you’re listening. I think that if you have a talent for acting, it is the talent for listening” (quoted in Taneja 2017, n.p.).

This training in listening certainly enabled Eastwood to create an interesting character in close-ups because in his performance as Kincaid his responses are never mechanical, he takes his time to listen to the stimulus, assimilate it, let it affect him and then react, just as in real life, as John Foote remarks:

His performance as Kincaid was one to be proud of, capturing the heartache of a man who knows with every fibre of his being he has found the one woman right for him, but also knowing that they cannot be together because of what fate has dealt them. Rarely had he ever risked this much before as an actor, and never had he been this emotionally naked on screen. (Foote 2009, 112-13)

Undoubtedly, to achieve this truth in the composition of his character, Eastwood made use of the first requirement that Konstantin Stanislavski established for the film actor: the actor’s *follow through* (Stanislavski 1986, 173-83), or being able with the power of the imagination to transform his or her whole being, with its own individual traits and qualities, into something different that no longer belongs to the actor but rather to the character he or she embodies. In short, it is about following a path from the conscious to the unconscious, or knowing the character to such an extent that, in a second stage, it can be controlled from the unconscious, that is, from the feeling of ease infused in a truthful scene. The process of building a character begins with the desire to know it thoroughly; it is a conscious process that seeks to find out the greatest possible number of things about the character: the more things we know about the person, the better we will know them. It is about filling the space that surrounds the character with information specific to the story and to the other characters: their cultural background, historical period, geographical situation, profession, etc. On the other hand, control of a character is an unconscious process, because once all the information has been assimilated, the actor can forget about it and act without being aware of what has been learned. Only when one acts unconsciously (as we do in life) will

the character seem alive and will we have achieved a truthful scene (Stanislavski 1989, 139-77).

Following these ideas of Stanislavski's acting method, Eastwood focused on building a context, a backstory for Kincaid as an effective means for giving richness and depth to the character so that the actor can fuse with it. Eastwood's interpretation of Kincaid delves beyond the limits of the script in order to explore the realm of emotions, which unavoidably leads to him discovering what he truly feels about someone, in this case his beloved Francesca. An example of this acting work is the scene leading to definitive physical contact between the two stars in the Johnson family's kitchen. What should have distanced them, an untimely phone call from Francesca's friend, actually brings them closer together: she puts her hand on his neck and shoulder, while we deduce the telephone conversation is about him, and he strokes her hand lightly. This is the preamble to them starting to dance and kiss in time to the Johnny Hartman ballad, filling the homey space of the kitchen with his music and transforming it into the warm setting of a heartfelt romance.

The success of the close-up of Kincaid in the rain is undoubtedly due to Eastwood's work as an actor with the backstory, which is essential for the close-up to be so powerfully expressive on screen. As we can imagine, the success of this *antecedent* is directly related to the deep knowledge the actor had of Kincaid's character, a real challenge for Eastwood, and one he had never before faced. He had never in his long career portrayed the flat-out romantic lead in a classic romance. Certainly, he had grown as an actor over the years, giving a stunning performance in *Unforgiven* (Clint Eastwood, 1992) that was good enough for both an Oscar nomination and for the Los Angeles Film Critics Association to name it best of year. But the western was familiar ground to him. This was entirely different. A detailed knowledge of the character's background during the pre-production period, in which the aspects that most influence him were perfectly clear, allowed him to place himself for that particular shot. Indeed, much of the success of his co-star Meryl Streep as Karen Blixen in *Out of Africa* (Sydney Pollack, 1985), was due to the work she did on the background of her character during pre-production, providing her with the knowledge she needed about Africa in the 1920s and 1930s: learning about how coffee trees

grow and when they flower, about the work on a coffee plantation, understanding how whites related to each other (mainly British and Kenyans), studying African tribes with their slow rhythm of life and where long stories are part of nightly entertainment, learning about the political situation and what happened in East Africa during World War I.

The more specific and more focused the antecedent, the better the resulting scene (Ray 2003, 78). The antecedent demands an important emotional commitment by the actor, although not from his mind, as that is not sufficient. In acting, the mind is only useful if it guides the person towards their feelings. It is not enough just to think what the previous moment would have been. One has to be immersed in it, be overwhelmed by it, speak with oneself, turn to one's feelings, for a character built without an emotional core is like the silhouette of a cardboard cut-out of a human (Esper and DiMarco 2018, 17). Under the cold, rational exterior of each person is a passionate inner life, and more so in this scene. We should remember that the film belongs to the melodramatic genre, traditionally defined by excess, by the need to express everything, especially the character's deepest feelings. Likewise, Eastwood is perfectly aware that in this scene words are not enough, and gestures become metaphorical indications of that which, because it is so close to the essence of a person, cannot be expressed. In this way, Eastwood chooses to redirect the dramatic conflicts and move the lead male character, Kincaid, to centre stage, so that his portrayal of this character reflects the tensions underlying the story. Therefore, Kincaid's action in this close-up does not reveal his intentions or hidden desires directly, but instead it becomes the receiver of the redirection of his true feelings: Kincaid soaked in the pouring rain works as a reflection of the symptoms shown by the character, in a process explained through the Freudian concept of hysteria, according to which repressed desires and fears can transcend apparent reality to reach a "true reality" that remains hidden and which is shaped by the world of feelings, the most sincere qualities of these two people: Kincaid and Francesca. Concentrated and situated in this character's present, the actor Eastwood, following Stanislavski's method, has clearly focused on precisely defining the circumstances given to his character, so that, through a series of key

questions (Where do I come from? What were my previous circumstances? What am I doing now? Where am I going? What is my story in this scene?), he obtains sufficiently stimulating antecedents for the shot.

For these reviewed antecedents to work and for them to be sufficiently suggestive in that close-up shot, another fundamental element is needed in the composition of the film character: the counterpoint. Undoubtedly, this is because one of the maxims of film acting is that a character must surprise spectators with some unexpected resource. Mystery always exists in any relationship, and no matter how much we know about a person or how well we know them, there will always be something in their heart or mind that we are unaware of. If a character wants to introduce an element of surprise, he or she must be more than just a combination of coherences. People are illogical and unpredictable. In every human there is love and hate, creativity and self-destruction, wakefulness and sleep, day and night, joy and depression, the desire to love and to kill. This being and not being, loving and not loving, creates the character's counterpoints. Each positive or negative characteristic the actor finds when studying the character must always have a corresponding opposite aspect (Stanislavski 2017, 53). To develop good counterpoint in a character means injecting it with complexity, fascination and a certain mystery. Change is the essence of colour and, in acting terms, becomes almost synonymous with "variety" and "development." It is about frustrating the character to achieve a higher level of energy and dramatic conflict in the scene. In this way, the scene is more interesting because it creates empathy in viewers, given that they have their own frustrations that make them identify more closely with the character.

In an interview with Ric Gentry (1998, 3-24), we learn that Eastwood developed the antecedents of this shot to include just the right amount of counterpoint (the obstacles). Eastwood used the antecedent of the comforting feeling of finding something lasting to cling to, to love, and contrasting it with the image of the bridges and the truck (where Francesca sits), as a metaphor for life's opportunities: a river that flows under a bridge only once on its journey, and when the river flows past the bridge, that opportunity is lost. Eastwood's approach to his character's counterpoint, by working

on these mental images, gave Kincaid's close-up a sense of mystery which makes him particularly attractive for the spectator, since it endows him with more meaning and reinforces him with more nuances: he adds an aura of ambiguity about the nature of this individual, who seems fragile and powerful, reflective yet strong at the same time. Finally, the antecedent with the counterpoint mentioned above adds brilliance to the continuation of this scene with Francesca, which speaks to us mainly about loss and resignation: Francesca fixes her gaze on the truck in which Kincaid is about to leave the city, grasps the door handle, she hesitates, her husband sounds his horn, the traffic light turns green and, finally, Kincaid turns off in the opposite direction to his lover's.

Conclusion

In an impromptu master class colloquium with his friend Kenneth Turan at the 2017 Cannes Film Festival¹, where tribute was paid to him at the age of 87, Eastwood said that movies should always excite the emotions, since cinema is far from being an intellectual art. And it is precisely this which underlies the success of *The Bridges of Madison County*: from the beginning, the film manages to successfully transmit heightened emotion to the viewer. As we have seen, this success is almost completely due to the way Eastwood works with the faces of Kincaid and Francesca, allowing the viewer to be emotionally moved from beginning to end, and, therefore, to connect and empathize with the characters and their story. As John Foote remarks,

Throughout the shoot there was genuine affection and admiration between the two actors. For Eastwood, in particular, this marked the most intimate performance of his career, as never before had he tackled a role that required him to be so close, physically and emotionally, with a woman on screen. The chemistry between the pair would explode on the screen when the film opened, bringing a sizzling eroticism, absent from so many adult romances these days. (Foote 2009, 109-10)

Eastwood, as director-actor, knew perfectly well that the actor's work in the close-up is in the eyes and dedicated a great deal of thought to imagining the characters and, in particular, his character

within the confines of a small space designed by the camera. This is particularly admirable and outstanding in the close-up we have analysed of Kincaid in the rain because Eastwood was able to work successfully with the sense of listening. As discussed throughout this article, the key to training in the art of listening consists in a process that involves all five senses in order to respond to a stimulus in the scene, thus reinforcing the meaning of the dialogue through everything else the actor perceives: a headache, heat or cold, the other actor's feelings and mood, their smell, the way they walk or sit, etc. Generally, good film actors do not mechanise their replies in their performance, but take time to hear the stimulus, assimilate it, allow it to affect them, and then react. It is about travelling from the conscious to the unconscious, or knowing the character so well that, in a second stage, it can be controlled unconsciously, that is, from the feeling of ease infused in a truthful scene.

The close-up in Eastwood's *The Bridges of Madison County*, where Kincaid looks in the pouring rain at Francesca sitting in her husband's truck, generates an emotion in the viewer that stems from all the work on the character by the filmmaker-actor. He achieves this by fundamentally combining two ideas with which he builds a whole context or backstory regarding his character: Kincaid is not the archetype of a traditional man like Francesca's husband (Richard) and, second, Kincaid's personality is rounded off and enriched by a "feminine" fragility and anxiety that leads him to construct a character who bears the stamp of the concept of the new masculinity (Bingham 1993). This ultimately makes him stand out even more as the new hero of romantic melodrama. Handling these two emotional binomials provides Kincaid with a solid, precise target in his interaction with Francesca, thus playing with the listen-feel dynamic which makes possible a performance that is fluid and free of blockages.

Eastwood's methodical work, following Stanislavski's criteria, focuses on investigating the antecedents of his main character (Kincaid) during the production process, posing a series of key questions which provide in-depth knowledge of the character's circumstances and, ultimately, enable him to situate himself perfectly within the character in order to portray him in this specific shot. In addition, as we pointed out, these antecedents work

because they provide the necessary counterpoint to surprise the viewer with an unexpected factor. Indeed Eastwood filled Kincaid with complexity and mystery, using the antecedent of the feeling of comfort which comes from finding true love, and contrasting it with the image of the bridges and the truck (where Francesca is) as a metaphor for the fleeting opportunities life grants us: the waters of a flowing river.

In conclusion, Eastwood manages to seduce with his eyes in this close-up of Kincaid in the rain in *The Bridges of Madison County*, because during the period of the film's preproduction and production he applied the first requirement that Stanislavski (1986) established for the film actor: the actor's follow through, being able with the power of the imagination to transform his or her whole being, with its own individual traits and qualities, into something different that no longer belongs to them but to the character they embody. Eastwood himself would confess: "I will admit that there's certainly a bit of myself in Kincaid" (Coblentz and Kapsis 2012, 175). In fact by working on listening, antecedents and the necessary counterpoint, Eastwood skillfully endows Kincaid with an emotional core composed of a lively and sensitive personality (a feeling man), a precursor of the new masculinity, who thinks and acts with the same determination in his objectives as a real man in real life, but without breaking or losing the links that are indispensable to maintain this determination of human behaviour. Those links are driven precisely towards the film's final goal and the final formulation of his ideas.

NOTE

1. When a journalist asked him why his directing style is very instinctive, Eastwood replied that the art of filmmaking is fundamentally emotional and not intellectual. Hence his particular aversion to rehearsing scenes and his predilection for first takes, something he learned from Sergio Leone and Don Siegel and which the filmmaker considers essential: "My instincts are much better than my intellect. You have to trust them. By pseudo-intellectualizing, you lock yourself in a box and the result can be a boring movie." Gregorio Belinchón, "Clint Eastwood: Las películas deben ser emocionantes, no intelectuales," *El País*, 22 May 2017, https://elpais.com/cultura/2017/05/21/actualidad/1495384338_531729.html.

BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

- Benoliel, Bertrand. 2010. *Clint Eastwood*. Paris: Cahiers du cinéma.
- Bingham, Dennis. 1993. "Masculinity, Star Reception and the Desire to Perform: Clint Eastwood in *White Hunter, Black Heart*." *Post Script: Essays in Films and the Humanities* 12 (2): 40-53.
- Bingham, Dennis. 1994. *Acting Male: Masculinities in the Films of James Stewart, Jack Nicholson and Clint Eastwood*. New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press.
- Bingham, Dennis. 2011. *Clint Eastwood*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Bordwell, David. 1995. *Making Meaning: Inference and Rhetoric in the Interpretation of Cinema*. Harvard: Harvard University Press.
- Boscagli, Maurizia. 1993. "A Moving Story: Masculine Tears and the Humanity of Televised Emotions." *Discourse. Journal for Theoretical Studies in Media and Culture* 15 (2): 64-79. <https://digitalcommons.wayne.edu/discourse/vol15/iss2/4>.
- Carlson, Michael. 2002. *The Pocket Essential Clint Eastwood*. Harpenden: Pocket Essentials.
- Chirica, Irina. 2018. "Masculinity in the Western Genre." *Romanian Journal of Artistic Creativity* 6 (4): 55-64.
- Coblentz, Kathie, and Robert E. Kapsis (eds.). 2012. *Clint Eastwood: Interviews*, revised and updated edition. Jackson: University Press of Mississippi.
- Combs, Robert. 1996. "Old Ghosts: *The Bridges of Madison County*." *Film Comment* 32 (3): 25-32.
- Cornell, Drucilla. 2009. *Clint Eastwood and Issues of American Masculinity*. New York: Fordham University Press.
- Deleuze, Gilles. 1989. *Cinema 2: The Time Image*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Doane, Marie Ann. 1987. *The Desire to Desire: The Woman's Film of the 1940s*. London: MacMillan.
- Engel, Leonard. 2007. *Clint Eastwood, Actor and Director: New Perspectives*. Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press.
- Engel, Leonard. 2012. *New Essays on Clint Eastwood*. Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press.
- Esper, William, and Damon Dimarco. 2018. *Arte y oficio del actor*. Barcelona: Alba Editorial.
- Felperin, Leslie. 1995. "The Bridges of Madison County." *Sight and Sound* 9: 46.
- Foote, John. 2009. *Clint Eastwood. Evolution of a filmmaker*. Westport: Praeger.
- Gentry, Ric. 1998. "Clint Eastwood: An Interview." *Post Script* 17 (3): 3-24.
- Guerif, François. 1987. "L'homme sans nom." *Spotlight* 8: 29-31.
- Knapp, Laurence. 1996. *Directed by Clint Eastwood*. Jefferson: McFarland & Co.
- McCarthy, Todd. 1995. "Bridges Spans Book's Gaps: *The Bridges of Madison County*." *Variety* 22: 91.
- Neibaur, James L. 2015. *The Clint Eastwood Westerns*. Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield.
- Pawelczak, Andy. 1995. "The Bridges of Madison County." *Films in Review* 46 (7-8): 54.
- Pezzotta, Alberto. 2007. *Clint Eastwood*. Madrid: Cátedra.
- Ray, Nicholas. 2003. *Action. Sur la direction d'acteurs*. Paris: Yellow Now / Femis.
- Smith, Paul. 1993. *Clint Eastwood: A Cultural Production*. London: UCL Press.
- Stanislavski, Konstantin. 1986. *Building a Character*. London: Methuen.
- Stanislavski, Konstantin. 1989. *An Actor Prepares*. New York and London: Routledge.
- Stanislavski, Konstantin. 2017. *El método. Entrenamiento y ejercicios*. Madrid: La Pajarita de Papel.
- Sterritt, David. 2014. *The Cinema of Clint Eastwood: Chronicles of America*. New York: Columbia University Press.

- Taneja, Roshan. 2017. *Moments of Truth: My Life with Acting*. New Delhi: Bloomsbury.
- Thomas, Deborah. 2000. *Beyond Genre: Melodrama, Comedy and Romance in Hollywood Films*. Moffat: Cameron & Hollis.
- Travers, Peter. 1995. "Movies Bridges of Tides." *Rolling Stone* (29): 47-48.
- Van Fuqua, Joy. 1996. "Can You Tell It Joe: Male Melodrama and the Feeling Man." *The Velvet Light Trap* (38): 28-38.
- Walker, Michael. 1982. "Melodrama and the American Cinema." *Movie* (29-30): 2-38.
- Williams, Linda. 2001. *Playing the Race Card: Melodramas of Black and White from Uncle Tom to O.J. Simpson*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

RÉSUMÉ

Clint Eastwood et sa performance dans *The Bridges Of Madison County* comme un précurseur de la nouvelle masculinité: le gros plan de Robert Kincaid sous la pluie Antonio Cantos Ceballos

Cet article vise à expliquer comment Clint Eastwood construit le personnage masculin principal, Robert Kincaid, dans son film *The Bridges of Madison County* (1995) comme un précurseur manifeste de la nouvelle masculinité et, par conséquent, comment il permet au spectateur de se connecter avec lui (et avec l'histoire) sur le plan émotionnel. Cet homme sensible est particulièrement visible dans une scène mémorable presque à la fin du film, dans laquelle prévaut l'allure minimaliste du personnage, lorsque, sous une pluie battante, il se dirige vers Francesca (Meryl Streep) qui est assise, et qui reste assise, dans le camion de son mari. Cette scène est l'une des plus audacieuses de la carrière d'Eastwood, car Kincaid est littéralement détrempé par la pluie, épuisé émotionnellement, et tout glamour a définitivement été effacé de son image. En appliquant à son analyse la méthode analytique de nature qualitative et interprétative, cet article expliquera comment, afin d'atteindre cette fragilité et cette sensibilité (attributs culturellement féminins), la performance d'Eastwood dépasse les limites du scénario pour explorer le domaine des émotions comme une manière efficace de donner richesse et profondeur au personnage, l'amenant inévitablement à découvrir ce qu'il ressent vraiment pour quelqu'un, en l'occurrence sa bien-aimée Francesca.