

Trampling out the Vintage: Revenge and Resentment in *High Noon*

SIMON PETCH

Revenge is the mainspring of the plot of *High Noon*, but resentment is the emotion at the conceptual core of the film. In the words of the song, “The noon-day train will bring Frank Miller” to carry out his sworn revenge against Marshal Kane, who five years previously arrested him, and presumably against Judge Mettrick, who sentenced him to death. This capital sentence, which was elsewhere commuted to life, has now been transmuted to a pardon. The processes and pressures through which the original sentence has been nullified are – like many of the film’s details – unexplained. But the film is much more focused on the threat of violence and disorder that follows from this apparently political decision than it is on revenge. It is this threat that creates and promotes resentment in Hadleyville, both as an emotion that several individual characters feel against Marshal Kane, and as a more subtle and pervasive structure of social feeling.

The western film took generic shape in the mid-twentieth century as a reworking of the motifs of revenge tragedy.¹ These motifs centre on the ethical and moral consequences of revenge. Typically, the western plot turns on the need to remedy injustice, which may involve the hero transgressing the law by taking it into his own hands. Good examples of this thematic pattern may be found in such classic westerns as John Ford’s *The Searchers*, in Clint Eastwood’s *Unforgiven*, and in the many films about Wyatt Earp. In such films the hero, treading a fine line between justice and revenge, may find himself beset by conflict and questioning, both from others, and from within himself. *High Noon* reverses this pattern, for Will Kane is the object of revenge rather than a vengeful subject. Frank Miller is an impending and threatening presence, but we don’t see him until late in the action, and in his interior life the film has no interest: his motivation is clear, he fulfils the expectations with

which the plot invests him, and he experiences no change, crisis, or self-doubt. There are some in Hadleyville who believe that the fact that both men have had relationships with Helen Ramirez provides Kane with a personal motive for revenge against Miller (even Amy Kane suggests at one point that she thinks that her husband's feelings for Helen Ramirez must be keeping him in Hadleyville). But Kane is not the initiator of the action, for while he clearly believes that Miller's pardon is unjust, and while the film's action sees him trying to remedy that injustice, it is Miller's return to Hadleyville that places the marshal, and indeed the community, under duress.

High Noon puts the motifs of the revenge drama in the service of its social theme by varying, or even reversing them. The film apparently omits the structures of family obligation that are as important to revenge tragedy as they are to most westerns, for in both genres vengeance is usually driven by the death of kin. But here, again, we can see significant variations. The deaths of Amy Fowler's father and brother have turned her against revenge and violence; as she says, with hopeful determination, "There must be a better way." Kane's only family is his wife, and of course that relationship is tested and reconstituted during the course of the film's action. But from the outset Kane is thinking socially rather than personally: just moments after his wedding he is prepared to put his wife in danger to carry out what he believes to be his duty. Therefore society is a more significant focus than family in *High Noon*, which explores its meanings through Kane's increasingly complex dealings with the citizens of Hadleyville.

Kane's relationship with the townsfolk reaches its crisis in the scene in the church, in which Kane first appeals for help, and then watches in appalled silence as the townsfolk debate what to do. Before Kane enters the church, we see and hear the choir and parson singing Julia Ward Howe's "Battle Hymn of the Republic", the most famous song to come out of the (then recent) Civil War, and a stirring call to social and spiritual responsibility. The second of the verses sung is the fourth:

He has sounded forth the trumpet that shall never call retreat;

He is sifting out the hearts of men before his judgment-seat . . .

Yet this forthright public discourse of judgment and accountability is fractured, because the congregation do not join in the singing with the parson and choir. They listen, and this pedagogic model may hint that Hadleyville is less democratic than authoritarian. As Kane intrudes on the service, the parson is announcing the text for his sermon, the opening verse of Malachi chapter 4: “For behold, the day cometh, that shall burn as an oven; and all the proud, yea, and all that do wickedly, shall be stubble: and the day that cometh shall burn them up, saith the Lord of hosts, that it shall leave them neither root nor branch.” Such an uncompromising anticipation of divine judgment harmonizes well with the words of the hymn, but the expectations it raises are belied by what follows. When called upon for advice, the parson who announced his text so boldly, and who publicly upbraids the marshal for not being a regular churchgoer, is himself radically indecisive. After admitting that the right and wrong seem “pretty clear” here, he stops well short of calling the community to action, and confesses himself lost for words: “I’m sorry. I don’t know what to say. I’m sorry.”

In such a vacuum, others are more forthcoming. The immediate, positive response to Kane’s appeal is halted by a call from an elderly man to “hold it”: “Before we go rushing into something that ain’t going to be so pleasant, let’s be sure we know what this is all about.” The subsequent debate fudges any clear sense of “what this is all about”. One early speaker says that the situation is the fault, and therefore the problem, of “the politicians up north” who pardoned Miller – and therefore not a problem for the citizens of Hadleyville. This evades the reality of the situation – Miller is on the noon train, although some in the church hope he isn’t – but it is the prelude to more elaborate kinds of evasion. “What have we been paying for all this time?” asks one speaker. “I’ve been saying right along that we ought to have more deputies”, says another. “This whole thing’s been handled wrong”, says a third. This cacaphony of equivocation is punctuated by two strong voices on Kane’s behalf. First there is Ezra, who says he can’t believe some of

the things he's heard, that the townsfolk should all be ashamed of themselves, that Kane is the best marshal they've ever had, and that there's only one thing to do; and then there is an unnamed woman, who echoes Ezra's admonition, before adding: "Don't you remember when a decent woman couldn't walk down the street in broad daylight? Don't you remember when this town wasn't a fit place to bring up a child?"

Such confident clarity is thoroughly confounded by Jonas Henderson, who has now taken charge of the meeting. Henderson is the first of Hadleyville's three selectmen (aldermen). The other two are Sam Fuller and Martin Howe. All three were present at Kane's marriage early in the film, and all three betray Kane by failing to support him. Their motivations are very different. With Fuller it's a simple matter of cowardice. Martin Howe has the world-weary cynicism of an ex-lawman; as he says to Kane, "People got to talk themselves into law and order, maybe because down deep they don't care, they just don't care." Jonas Henderson presents a more complex case, and what he says in the church constitutes a decisive moment in the film. He begins in apparent contrast to the previous, evasive speakers, by appealing to the citizens' responsibility: "It's our problem because this is our town." But as he continues he presents the issue as a pragmatic one of public relations and capital investment. Any concern for the safety of the citizens is masked by Henderson's sense of the image Hadleyville will present to potential investors up north. If there's gunplay in the street, then the image will be that of "just another wide-open town", and civic progress will be set back by five years. In apparent praise of Kane, Henderson then reminds the congregation that the marshal "didn't have to come back today". But then comes the sting, at which Kane's head turns sharply in surprise: "And for his sake and the sake of this town, I wish he hadn't. Because if he's not here when Miller comes, my hunch is that there won't be any trouble – not one bit." Itself a triumph of public relations, Henderson's slippery secular sermon reconfigures the problem facing Hadleyville, for the difficult presence now is no longer Miller, but Kane himself. Miller, it seems, can be managed if Kane is not there to

confront him. Henderson's sense of civic politics, his discourse of image and management, is as insidious as it is powerful and pragmatic; and it carries the day by completely subverting the public spiritual discourse of the hymn and the sermon.

If Kane had only listened more carefully to the words of Judge Mettrick just before his departure, he would be less shocked by what Henderson has to say. Stunned by his wife's ultimatum – "If you won't go with me now, I'll be on that train when it leaves here" – Kane is watching her drive away, when the judge arrives with his saddlebags to collect his gear from the office. Kane is relieved to see him because he wants the judge to authorize a posse, and thinks he'll have no trouble getting the ten or twelve guns he needs. The judge disagrees: "My intuition tells me otherwise." When Kane asks him why, the judge replies that this is not the time for "a lesson in civics", but he goes on to offer one anyway: "In the fifth century BC the citizens of Athens, having suffered grievously under a tyrant, managed to depose and banish him. However when he returned some years later, with an army of mercenaries, those same citizens not only opened the gates for him, but stood by while he executed members of the legal government." Mettrick is almost certainly referring to Pisistratus, whose extraordinary sixth-century BC dictatorship over Athens fell into at least two phases (according to the historian Herodotus he was actually banished twice). But the judge's parable of mob fickleness may not be the whole story. In the words of Herodotus: "Pisistratus was no revolutionary, but governed the country in an orderly and excellent manner, without changing the laws or disturbing the existing magistracies." Totalitarianism and conformity are uncomfortably close to one another. Tyranny can take many forms, one of which is the insidiously authoritarian rule of the tyranny of the majority, and the mindless perpetuation of the status quo. No-one is going to put Frank Miller in charge of Hadleyville. But the social anxieties fomented by his return have such a disturbing hold on the citizens' imaginations that they seek to preserve the image of their town at just about any cost.

This is Kane's problem. Some of the townsfolk are certainly ready to welcome Miller back; and of the others, not only do they not want to join Kane in facing Miller, they want Kane to go. In the melting-pot of Hadleyville's civic politics, Miller's impending revenge provokes and promotes resentment of Will Kane. "This is my town", says Kane; "I've got friends here." But as the morning wears on these friends get harder to find; and, as the desk-clerk at the hotel says to Amy Kane, there are plenty of people who have lots of reasons not to like her husband, and who think that his deserved comeuppance is arriving on the noon train. Some of the resentment is obvious enough: those loyal to Miller – and he has plenty of friends in the saloon – have no time for the marshal. But the more subtle resentment comes from those Kane thinks are his friends, those citizens who acknowledge Kane's part in making the streets of Hadleyville safe for women and children. Such people, nominally loyal to Kane, naturally resent Miller for returning and putting pressure on them to act; but as Kane insists on facing up to Miller, the citizens' sense of injury or resentment is displaced onto Kane. This is the social pathology of Hadleyville: frustrated admiration of Marshall Kane turns to resentment of him, so much so that it is Will Kane and not Frank Miller who becomes the mid-day problem. Pressed to take responsibility and make uncomfortable decisions, the townsfolk are subtly (and not so subtly) vindictive towards Kane. They respond to his courage with prudence and expediency, and as they resent their obligation to him, so they subtly resent him. He can be sacrificed.

No-one resents Kane more than his deputy, Harvey Pell, who has both personal and professional cause for his resentment. Harvey thinks (or needs to think) that Kane resents his relationship with Kane's ex-lover Helen Ramirez. This is so absurd that Kane's presumed sexual jealousy can exist only as a projection of Harvey's own masculine insecurities. Helen Ramirez tells Harvey that it takes more than broad shoulders to make a man, and treats him as her toy-boy, with good-humoured contempt. It is as clear to us as it must be to Harvey that he could never take Kane's place in her life. Harvey is also

resentful because he has been passed over by the city fathers in their search for Kane's replacement, and he turns this resentment into an accusation against Kane: "The truth is, you probably talked against me from the start." "Probably" says it all, and Harvey, who has a lot to say for himself, has probably talked himself into believing these things, although his words (like his swaggering walk) are mere masks for his own sense of inferiority. His resentment of Kane is an inverted acknowledgment of his own insecurities, and those insecurities are the true cause of his resentment. After Harvey has turned in his badge, and after he has been banished from Helen Ramirez' hotel suite, he retires to the saloon to lick his wounds. The bartender's "It takes a smart man to know when to back away" must hurt, because "backing away" is (as Helen Ramirez alone acknowledges) exactly what Kane can't do, but what Harvey needs him to do. Harvey rudely dismisses the bartender; sitting alone, with his bottle and glass in front of him on the table, he hunkers down to drink. Suddenly catching sight of Kane through the window, Harvey is utterly transfixed, and as this happens the film's brilliant stylistic shifts report on Harvey's inner life. The saloon piano, which has been playing a slow-tempo version of the film's theme music, now abruptly switches to an up-tempo "Buffalo Girls"; the jangling honky-tonk is both fiercely expressive of Harvey's neurotically discordant emotions, and a mockery of his masculinity. Zinneman cuts between close-ups of Harvey, and close-ups of Kane: Harvey is conscious only of Kane, while Kane is unaware that he's the object of anyone's contemplation. The pattern of alternating close-ups sets up a contrast that dramatizes Harvey's realization of the difference between himself and Kane. As we see Harvey looking at Kane we simultaneously see the effect that Harvey has on Kane; and then we see Kane, the camera angles making clear that this cannot be Harvey's actual view of Kane. These images of Kane shape the viewer's sense of what Harvey perceives, and reveal his torment at Kane's evident purpose and commitment.

Lost in a reverie of resentment, without the defences of his swaggering walk and swaggering talk, Harvey is closer to being

sympathetic here than at any other time in the film. This remarkable sequence is accomplished entirely through the finely-determined editing of imagery and sound. A strikingly non-verbal achievement, it contrasts strongly with the film's presentation of a man whose resentment of Kane is more gradual, and which is rendered almost entirely through words. After the judge has left town and Harvey has quit, the first of the potential deputies, Herb, arrives. Herb's apparently uncomplicated commitment is inspired by his evident admiration of Will Kane: "You cleared this town up. You made it a fit place for women and kids to live." "I was hoping you'd feel that way", says Kane, to which Herb replies, "What other way is there?" Later in the film Herb himself supplies the bitter answer to his own rhetorical question. Kane, having been rebuffed by the selectmen, betrayed in church, laughed out of the saloon, and roughed up by Harvey, returns to his office to find Herb waiting for him – the only man to have committed himself, and the one Kane (and probably the viewer) has forgotten. When Herb realizes that Kane has no deputies, he is incredulous: "This town ain't that low."

But soon he is furiously backpedalling from his earlier, eager commitment. His conversation with Kane approximates the form of a dramatic monologue, with Kane as the auditor, in which Kane's brief interjections (intended by Kane to help Herb out of his commitment) become cues for Herb to get himself deeper into trouble. His talk is a blend of aggressive assertion and rhetorical questioning; the assertions and the questions are equally charged with resentment: "This is just plain committing suicide, and for what? Why me? I'm no lawman, I just live here." The lawman, Kane, must feel the barb in Herb's words, and Herb, angry at the position in which he finds himself, turns his anger into self-justification. "I've got nothing personal against nobody" implies that Kane has something personal against somebody, and "I've got no stake in this" conveniently ignores the fact that to "just live" in Hadleyville makes him a stakeholder in the community. "I guess not", says Kane; but Herb can't take the exit quietly, and the more he tries to justify himself, the more he turns on Kane.

“There’s a limit to how much you can ask a man”, he says, before accusing Kane of misrepresenting the situation: “This ain’t like you said it was going to be.” Frustrated, he finds that he can only excuse himself by blaming Kane, although blaming the marshal is not his intention; for his main concern is to justify himself, and this is what leads him into confusion. The climax of what he has to say is an appeal to his family: “I got a wife and kids. What about my kids?” Herb has come full circle. His loyalty to Kane was grounded in the knowledge that Kane had made Hadleyville a safe place to raise a family; now, that family has become Herb’s rationalized excuse for withdrawing his loyalty from Kane. He is chasing his tail, and with some difficulty, because his tail is between his legs.

These two dramatic instances of resentment against Kane are symptomatic of the broader, community-based resentment against the law itself, which is also represented by Kane. The citizens of Hadleyville don’t understand how the law works, nor do they fully acknowledge what they want from it. They want both too much, and not enough. In the church Mr Trumble tells the marshal that he should have arrested the three gunmen awaiting Frank Miller at the railway depot, but, as Kane points out, he can’t arrest them because they haven’t done anything wrong. Trumble wants the law to be an instrument of social control, to use it in the execution of what is socially desirable, prudent, and expedient. The citizens of Hadleyville want their streets fit for women and children, and Kane’s rule of law has achieved that. But when the rule of law becomes awkward or obtrusive, then they would rather it were sidestepped. Kane’s very courage challenges the citizens’ prudence by bringing the rule of law home to their consciences, by making them to acknowledge it as integral to the very notion of community. To Kane, the law is a matter of civic and social responsibility. The townsfolk aren’t comfortable with this, for while they want a good outcome, they don’t want to have to take responsibility for it. So they determine by an almost intuitively institutionalized way of thinking that Frank Miller and all he stands for is Kane’s responsibility, either as their paid agent or employee, or because of his supposed “personal trouble” with Frank Miller

(concerning Helen Ramirez). They relate to their legal system as consumers; it's as if they want their legal services outsourced or done for them. It may be significant here that the marshal is an appointed rather than an elected office, and therefore connected only tangentially to the nominally democratic aspirations of the American republic.

“This is just a dirty little village in the middle of nowhere.” Judge Mettrick’s words to Kane betray his contempt for the American heartland, and his parable from Ancient History is pointed by his own removal of the American flag from the wall of his office – the very flag before which the Kanes were married earlier in the morning. In the ironic discrepancy between his words and actions, the judge is himself a lesson in civics, because the folding and stowing of the flag is itself a betrayal of the ideals it represents. But, in yet another twist, the judge is being true to Hadleyville, for in packing away the flag, the scales of justice, and his law books, the judge signifies not only the portability and mobility of justice – “I’ve been a judge in many towns, and I hope to live to be a judge again” – but also its commodification; and such commodification sits easily with the image-conscious expediency and circumspection of many of Hadleyville’s citizens (one thinks of Mr Weaver’s wary approach to Mrs Ramirez as well as of Henderson’s words in church). The judge’s cynical contempt for the rule of law therefore matches the citizens’ resentment of it, and the coincidence of Frank Miller’s return with the marshal’s resignation is symbolically appropriate, for it sets in motion a train of circumstances that puts the rule of law aside. The legal culture of Hadleyville is politically compromised, and Harvey Pell’s gun becomes a reminder of this compromise. When Harvey resigns he removes his badge and his gunbelt, and as he leaves the marshal’s office he hangs his gunbelt on a peg to the left of the door. This visual prop is a strong reminder that the law will not just take care of itself, that it is not a self-sustaining commodity, and that if the law is to be lived it may require enforcement. It hangs where Harvey leaves it until almost the end of the film: almost; for this is the gun with which Amy Fowler Kane will shoot Jim Pierce.

The counter to the Hadleyville compromise is the unselfconscious integrity of Will Kane. For Will Kane there is no essential difference between his personal identity and his public role as marshal, and soon after Will and Amy Kane have returned to Hadleyville, and while she is trying to dissuade him from staying to face Frank Miller, he tells Amy, "I'm the same man with or without this [badge]." The straightforward simplicity of his earlier remark, "I think I ought to stay", rests on its confident use of the first person as much as on the compounded verbal obligation of "think" and "ought", which contrasts with the speakers in the church scene whose uses of the plural "we" and "our" are evasions of personal responsibility. Kane's pronouns link the marshal and the man; but this integration of public and personal comes under increasing pressure as the morning wears on, and the pressure is never stronger than in Kane's sole visit to the saloon.

As he enters, he hears the bartender say, "I'll give you odds that Kane's dead five minutes after Frank gets off the train." Kane's response is to floor the bartender. This is at least understandable: his morning is deteriorating by the minute, and while it must be bad enough to hear his death spoken of so casually, the familiarity of "Frank" surely cuts hard against the curtness of "Kane". The bartender attempts to retrieve his dignity by scrambling for the moral high ground, which he does by reminding Kane of his public persona: "You carry a badge and a gun, marshal. You had no call to do that." "You're right", agrees a distressed Kane, holding out his hand to help the man up, but his gesture is spurned. This is a morally ambivalent moment for Hadleyville as well as for Kane. The citizens call on their marshal in his institutional role only as and when it suits them to do so. They expect a higher than normal standard of behaviour from him, but this expectation gives them grounds from which to reprove him; and when such behaviour is forthcoming – as it is in the church – they may resent or reject it. Kane is laughed out of the saloon.

The saloon is one of the locations around which *High Noon* is structured, along with the marshal's office, the adjacent

office of the Justice of the Peace, the hotel, the church, the depot, Todd's Livery Stable, the barbershop. For much of the film, as Kane moves between these places, he walks the main street of Hadleyville. He is invariably alone, and as the big hands of the film's many clocks move towards high noon, the street gets progressively more deserted. As the public space of the street increasingly becomes his habitat, so the images of the street, with their stark sunlight and shadow, gradually acquire the menace of the urban landscapes of Losey or Hitchcock; they figure both the growing isolation of Will Kane, and the public vacuum in which he finds himself. After his encounter with Herb, Kane, staring death in the face, writes his Last Will and Testament, then comes out of his office into the empty street, which the subjective camera shows us, in all its terrifying emptiness, through his eyes. Hearing the sound of horses, Kane looks to his left to see the buggy taking his wife and Helen Ramirez to the rail depot. He watches as they ride by, and while Amy (who is driving) doesn't turn her head, Helen does, and keeps her eyes on Kane well after they have driven past him; now the subjective viewpoint becomes hers, and we see the receding Kane through her eyes. The paradoxical bond of separation and closeness which they share, and Amy's exclusion from it, is tellingly realized in the visual tension created by these carefully deployed perceptions. When we next see Kane he is still in the street outside his office, now in the sure and certain knowledge that he must face Miller and his men by himself. We see him first (as we have become very accustomed to doing) in close-up. Then, as he looks anxiously – even somewhat wildly – about him, as his hands rest fleetingly on his guns, and as he wipes his brow before turning to his right to walk to face his lonely ordeal, the camera zooms away from him. This – the film's only boom-shot – dramatically establishes how Kane's personal isolation and the public emptiness of the street define each other.

The first time we see Will Kane in *High Noon* he is at the centre of a social gathering, his own wedding. This civil ceremony performed before the American flag is crucial to the film's social meanings, and the significance of the Kaness'

marriage is suggested by three embraces between husband and wife, all associated with their departures from Hadleyville. First, after their wedding, they kiss privately. Will hustles Amy through the door between the Office of the Justice of the Peace into the Marshal's office, where he kisses her. Then, after Jonas Henderson has burst in with his ominous (if jovial) announcement that "The honeymoon is officially over", Kane give his wife a public, more playful kiss – a kiss that briefly obscures Kane's gunbelt, which is hanging from the wall, and which he will strap on when he returns only minutes later. This gunbelt is a reminder of all that Amy wants to take her husband away from, but it's also a premonition of the gunbelt that becomes so important later in the film. The movement from these two embraces, private and public, to the Kanes' final embrace at the end of the film represents a movement from innocence to experience that has reconfigured their marriage. Kane's will marks a key stage in this movement – a document that we see him write, and that we know Amy reads, and so a document exclusively personal to them, to which no-one else has access (it isn't even witnessed). In the main street of Hadleyville, at the end of the film, they cling desperately to each other in the knowledge that each of them has gained: Amy's eyes are closed, but the wedding ring is visually prominent on the hand with which she clings to her husband's shoulder, and this coming together is effectively a remarriage, an intensely private moment in public view.

Fred Zinneman has said that to him the story in *High Noon* was a simple thing. "To me, it's a picture of conscience as against compromise: how far one can follow one's conscience before having to compromise – just that, nothing else." This universal theme is not realized in the film in simple terms, for it has both personal and public aspects, and Amy Fowler Kane may be the film's most interesting variation on the theme: shooting a man in the back as he reloads his guns is a fairly severe compromise of her Quaker conscience. This theme is socially inflected by the film's concern with law and community. That is why the church scene is so significant, for it is here that the social conscience of Hadleyville, and the

individual consciences of its citizens, are compromised by a spurious appeal to corporate identity. Five years after the film's release, in 1957, American social commentator William H. Whyte published *The Organization Man*, a book which identified and analysed an ideology of collectivization that Whyte believed to be pervading American society in the nineteen-fifties. He defined this as a Social Ethic, a "body of thought which makes morally legitimate the pressures of society against the individual", and he associated it primarily with corporate organizations. Whyte's analysis is useful to an understanding of the film. The church scene in *High Noon* perfectly dramatizes the process through which social pressures acquire their legitimacy, for as the parson finds himself unable to relate the teachings of the church to social action, the church comes in thrall to a secular ideology of collectivization. The question of how to confront Miller has been shuffled under the issue of how the town as a corporate entity may manage his return. Moral and legal imperatives have given way to the politics of imagery.

In the fifty years since this film was made we have become as familiar with the politics of imagery as we have become suspicious of the imagery of politics. Like audiences of the 1950s, we understand far better than his fictional audience of the 1870s the social forces that have conspired to make Jonas Henderson speak as he does. *High Noon* is certainly a film for its own time, but like all great fictions it reaches into the future; and in its indictment of the timid political conscience of a corporate culture, true only to a code of managerial compromise, it is a film for our time too.

1. Bibliographical Note

High Noon was directed by Fred Zinneman, and released in 1952. Zinneman's remarks about the film are quoted here from an interview he gave in 1993, the full transcript of which can be found in Arthur Nolletti, ed., *The Films of Fred Zinneman: Critical Perspectives* (Albany, NY: State University Press of New York, 1999). Phillip Drummond's *High Noon* (London:

British Film Institute, 1997) contains helpful information about the context and production of the film (although it also includes some factual errors), and provides a useful overview of some of the ways in which the film has been interpreted. David Kelly has written concisely on “The Classical Element in *High Noon*” in *mETAphor*, issue 3 (July, 2000).

My general remarks on revenge tragedy are indebted to John Kerrigan, *Revenge Tragedy: Aeschylus to Armageddon* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996), especially Part 1. And my thinking about resentment has been shaped by Richard H. Weisberg’s discussion of Nietzsche in *The Failure of the Word: The Protagonist as Lawyer in Modern Fiction* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1984), although I have not made use of the Nietzschean concept of “*ressentiment*”. William H. Whyte mentions *High Noon* briefly in *The Organization Man* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1957), p.257, although he doesn’t analyse the film.

I am grateful to Frances Muecke, of the Department of Classics at the University of Sydney, for telling me about Pisistratus, and for sending me to Herodotus, in Book I of whose *History* the story of Pisistratus can be found (I have quoted from the Penguin translation).

SIMON PETCH is Senior Lecturer in the Department of English at the University of Sydney.