

UNIT FOUR

Questions for discussion:

The typical Western hero was an outsider—a wandering gunman who brings law to a lawless town. In the respect, *My Darling Clementine* was unusual—it had two outsiders, both of whom are experts in weaponry—the mark of the warrior—and good at dealing with death. The film studiously puts them together in shot after shot, sometimes (at the town bar) facing the camera, side by side. How do their images compare? How do they compare as figures of control? as agents of violence? The traditional climax in the Western was a face-off at twenty paces, with guns in holsters, ready to be drawn. In *Clementine*, such a face-off occurs between the two warrior figures in the midst of a desert landscape and it is not the climax of the film but a lead-up to the climax, in which the participants are obscured from one another by different obstacles and not face-to-face at all. What does this say about the acts of violence that supply the culmination of the film? What is the meaning in *Clementine* of the scene in which two of the townsfolk, armed with empty shotguns, appear on the street beside the Earps and Doc Halliday, then quietly put the shotguns down and stand to one side?

The long, opening song-and-dance with which the chorus enters in the *Agamemnon* gives us a good deal of history, describes a problem or dilemma that confronted Agamemnon and how he faced up to it, and then says something about the history of Zeus and the relation of human life to suffering. The dilemma has to do with choosing one of two evils when both are abhorrent. What was the choice about? Did Agamemnon make the right choice? Think of some parallel in modern times, or invent a case, where innocent life must be sacrificed for the sake of a justified enterprise. The ancient world of tragedy did not exhibit the killing of a victim on stage; in the *Agamemnon* the tragic agony is born by proxy, in the person of Cassandra, who experiences the horror of what is to take place, and her agony—the agony of the prophetess or seer—is the emotional center of the play. How does this shift of attention, from the dramatic participants to an observer, affect the meaning of the play?