

# Western films essay sample



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The Western film genre has been dead now for some 50 years now yet it continues to heavily influence many modern filmmakers. John Ford was one of the most famous Western genre filmmakers and director of *My Darling Clementine*, a quintessential example of the Western Genre. This film helped establish the archetypes of the genre. Not many modern filmmakers have tried their hand at the Western genre since its death but James Mangold has directed *3: 10 to Yuma*, a Western created long after the end of the “ classic” Western genre and amidst the height of the action genre.

While the characters and characters’ relationships are true to the Western genre many cinematographic techniques are different, including effects, speed and violence. These differences seem to be influences of the action genre which boasts lots of special effects, short camera shot lengths and an over exaggeration of violence. Based on this comparison, it is conclusive that *My Darling Clementine*’s director John Ford created a distinctive film that helped establish the Western genre while *3: 10 to Yuma*’s director James Mangold creates a modern style Western which is obviously more influenced by the action genre.

The Western genres character archetypes include a hero who is not driven by what is good or moral but by money or property. This character typically lives on the boarder of civility and wild and seems to not be tamable. This character is reflected in both *My Darling Clementine* and *3: 10 to Yuma* with Wyatt Earp and Dan Evans respectively. Wyatt Earp is moving cattle past a town when his brother is killed and he is asked to be the martial of the town, Tombstone. His initial motives are revenge or justice for his brother but as he

stays longer in Tombstone he becomes to care more for the people there like Doc Holliday.

Earp's and Holliday's relationship evolves while they are together and take the focus of the film. Like Wyatt Earp, Dan Evans initial motives for moving Ben Wade to the train is money for his run down farm but as he interacts with Wade their relationship begins to develop. Ben Wade seems to understand that Dan needs the money so knowing that he can escape from the train he lets Dan put him on it anyway. In both movies it is apparent that the focus of the movie is between the two main characters. The begin of the movies are more focused on the individual characters but once they meet it becomes clear that the movie will revolve around them.

In My Darling Clementine many of the other characters could be more interesting and more real but Ford decided to keep them underdeveloped. This creates contrast between the more mundane characters and the main characters' relationship. Likewise in 3: 10 to Yuma, the supporting characters seem to only be plot pieces instead of actual people in the story. They are used only to put the main characters in a different situation rather than interact on a relationship level with them. Based on these criteria the main character pairs and the relationship between them is the real driving force for the movies.

Probably the most notable difference between the two films technique wise is the use of colour. Colour brings a realism and detail to the screen that black and white just can not create. Although modern movies use colour, the colour in 3: 10 to Yuma is very dull which seems appropriate to the time and

story. This again creates a kind of realism. The colour is not the last place realism is created, it is also created through the use of sound and effects, specifically the gun shots. 3: 10 to Yuma is created much later than My Darling Clementine and for that reason it would be obvious the more modern film would have more realistic effects.

The gun shots in My Darling Clementine are merely plumes of smoke that do not create a sense of danger. The guns in 3: 10 to Yuma however, are very realistic and do create a stronger sense of danger and excitement more common to the action genre. There is sound in both movies but the quality of sound in 3: 10 to Yuma is much better. Having better sound and better effects however, does not necessarily create better movies, as seen in the fundamental example of the Star Wars sequels versus prequels. 3: 10 to Yuma uses its effects in a way rather than to create more “ beautiful” things but to dirty the film.

It makes the film grittier and more real but at the same time James Mangold over stylizes the violence which takes away from the realism. This mix of effects, used to create realism, and over the top action scenes is typical of the action genre. 3: 10 to Yuma is a western in plot and characters but in cinematography and effects it is much more like an action film. My Darling Clementine never over does the violence and when there is violence it seems important to the plot. The action in both 3: 10 to Yuma and My Darling Clementine is mainly - gun fights and bar brawls.

As soon as Wyatt Earp gets to Tombstone he gets into a fight with a gun waving drunk in the bar. This violence is what helps Wyatt Earp make his

decision about whether to stay in Tombstone or not. On the other hand Dan Evans and Ben Wade continue to fight Ben Wade's crew the entire time they are on their journey. There is hardly a moment in the movie where Dan and Ben are not being attacked. This violence would be useful if it developed Ben and Dan's relationship but it does not. Their relationship tends to develop when they are not being attacked.

Also, the speed at which things happen are much faster in 3: 10 to Yuma than they do in My Darling Clementine. My Darling Clementine has more drawn out and more build up scenes than 3: 10 to Yuma. 3: 10 to Yuma has scenes that are either surprising or were not expected. This use surprise is used to keep the viewer aware at all times. It holds the attention of the viewer better by creating a sense that we do not know what is going to happen. My Darling Clementine however has obvious build up moments that make the more tame gun battles seem more epic.

This comparison is again an example of how 3: 10 to Yuma is more influenced by the action genre than My Darling Clementine. The easiest comparison between action in 3: 10 to Yuma and My Darling Clementine is the final gun fight. In My Darling Clementine we know what Doc and Wyatt Earp are going to do. They are going to the OK corral to kill everyone there and for the most part they do so. This is different from 3: 10 to Yuma because while we know there will be men guarding the train we do not know how many or where they will be.

So Ben and Dan just run full speed to the train " guns a-blazing" and kill as many of them as possible. : 10 to Yuma's final battle is much more violent

and dramatic than *My Darling Clementine's*. Also, the speed at which these battles happen and their pace is incredibly different. *The OK corral* is much slower than *3: 10 to Yuma's* final battle at Contention Station, we see Wyatt and his men ride all the way there after we already saw another man ride there. In *3: 10 to Yuma* we wait for Dan and Ben to leave the hotel room, we know they will go outside and fight but not how they will do it. The pace of the battle at Contention station is much quicker as well.

The shots are much quicker and the speed at which Ben and Dan move is much quicker. All of the speed increase and dramatization can be attributed to the influence of the action genre. After looking at what makes a western and what makes an action movie and comparing a classic western to a western made in the action genre it is easy to see how modern westerns stray from the original idea of what the genre is. This movement away from the original idea is not necessarily bad however. The western film genre has influenced many action films and it is easy to see how the western is still alive under modern stories.

The way the directors use the western though is what distinguishes them, for example Han Solo in *Star Wars* could be described as a western hero. George Lucas uses this hero to create contrast between him and Luke Skywalker. Luke Skywalker being the pure and noble hero and Han Solo being the darker less moral hero. In *3: 10 to Yuma* James Mangold uses the characters and setting of the western but chooses to go with an action style of cinematography and violence. The violence in *3: 10 to Yuma* is an influence of the action genre, a genre that is one of the biggest at the time *3: 10 to Yuma* was made.

An interesting question however is, is John Ford's movie better because his style and technique are more his own rather than being influenced by an already established genre or is James Mangold's movie better because he combines two genres together really well. What James Mangold does better is use the action genre's speed and style to create a more compelling attention holding movie while Ford is better at creating a deeper sense of character. This means Ford's main characters feel more like they have purpose and have histories. He gives his other characters a lack of depth to contrast with the main characters.

James Mangold does some what of the same thing except his main characters seems to have less depth which he makes up for in contrasting them with brutally mundane characters. Overall, however, both movies have their positives and their negatives, they do what they tried to do and for that they must be applauded. It is obvious though that 3: 10 to Yuma is a western that is heavily influenced by the action genre as seen through its speed, pace, violence, and style while My Darling Clementine directed by John Ford is a traditional original film that stand as a quintessential western film.

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