

The visual argument of the big lebowski



One of the 650 film deemed “culturally, historically or aesthetically significant” by the Library of Congress’ National Film Registry is The Big Lebowski, a film described whose summary is “‘The Dude’ Lebowski, mistaken for a millionaire Lebowski, seeks restitution for his ruined rug and enlists his bowling buddies to help get it” (IMDB). The Big Lebowski follows this upon the surface, but there is a much deeper purpose. Directors Joel and Ethan Coen have stated the inspiration for the film were Raymond Chandler’s noir crime writings and wanted to put The Dude in “the most impossible of situations” as “the person who seemed least equipped to deal with it.” The Coen brothers manipulate the crime genre with The Big Lebowski to evaluate the nature of easily definable characters and expand on these characters true selves through credibility and empathy created in certain scenes.

Introductory scenes for both the Dude and Mr. Lebowski focus on the assessment given to their characters by society before the audience gets to determine how they truly behave. The introduction to The Dude comes in a typical grocery dairy section. The camera moves along the dairy section before The Dude comes on screen and the camera’s continued movement towards him establishes that The Dude is who the monologue states is “the man for his time and place, he fits right in there.” The Dude examines the creamer in a hoodie, stained t-shirt and shorts. The Dude then drinks from one of the creamers. The scene cuts to a disinterested check-out clerk before showing The Dude, with creamer in his goatee, writing a check for \$. 69. Without any previous context for the character, or any dialogue spoken besides the voice-over, the introduction of The Dude generates a way for the audience to perceive him. The introductory scene for Mr. Lebowski, on the

other hand, is more upfront. Mr. Lebowski comes into the scene with The Dude in an authoritative manner. The scene leading up to Mr. Lebowski examines the multiple awards won by Mr. Lebowski, including Time Man of the Year. These awards show how powerful Mr. Lebowski is and how the audience are to perceive him. As Mr. Lebowski enters in he holds himself in high regard and the camera's following of him expands on his presence. As the scene progresses and the camera cuts between Mr. Lebowski and The Dude it is clear Mr. Lebowski is a foil in nearly every way to The Dude. The introduction for both The Dude and Mr. Lebowski establish their characters and add credibility to the way they act as the film progresses.

After these introductory scenes, empathy is rendered for characters through the scenes illustrating hardships and destruction. The Dude, having been presented as a carefree individual, becomes a more fleshed out character and more empathetic with the scenes of his car's destruction. The first act of destruction for the car seems like a freak accident and it adds to the notion that The Dude is completely out of his element. As the destruction continues it appears that The Dude is almost cursed. When the car is finally destroyed near the end of the movie The Dude remarks, " Well, they finally did it. They killed my fucking car." This statement shows that, despite the overall carefree attitude, all the wild things that have happened to The Dude have affected him. The audience feels empathetic for The Dude, because he is presented as a man just trying to live his life, but instead has to deal with things like the destruction of his car. Mr. Lebowski also gains empathy from the audience, despite the coarse way he first appears. When The Dude gets called back to talk to Mr. Lebowski, the camera moves into the room similar

to the way it moved forward to the introduction of The Dude. Mr. Lebowski is sitting by fire side as Requiem by Mozart wails. The audience learns that Mr. Lebowski has secluded himself by this fire do to the kidnapping of his wife. Despite it being only the second scene in which the audience has seen Mr. Lebowski, it is a stark contrast from his first scene. The image is a stark one: a powerful millionaire vulnerable next to a fire. Mr. Lebowski even asserts that “ Strong men also cry.” These images of The Dude’s car destruction and Mr. Lebowski dealing with the kidnapping of his wife flesh out the characters and add empathy to their respective actions.

Furthering the evolution of characters, the first dream sequence expands on The Dude’s true self. In the scene The Dude floats through the Los Angeles skyline going after a woman on a floating carpet, it is later discovered the woman was Maude Lebowski, daughter of Mr. Lebowski. During the scene the cameras cuts closely to The Dude’s face to reveal absolute happiness. Unfortunately, this happiness is swiftly transformed into fear as a bowling ball is materialized into The Dude’s hand and he crashes down. This scene may seem simple on the surface, but it keys the audience into something important about The Dude. The scene shows The Dude chasing after Maude but is pulled away by bowling. It was not The Dude’s choice to be sent crashing down. The notion of bowling becomes a part of what the audience initially views the dude as: a typical stoner who likes to bowl with a couple of his buds. The dream sequence instead shows that The Dude is not totally carefree. Like the empathy gained during the scenes of vehicular destruction, the dream sequence makes The Dude seem like someone trying to live life his way but is even being torn apart by what he typically does.

After this early scene it is difficult to watch The Dude deal with the impossible situation he is put in, when he is not even happy with his routine way of existence. The Dude being pulled away from a beautiful woman he wants to be with gives him empathy and reveals that The Dude is not the stereotypical individual even presented by the Coen brothers. Instead, The Dude is a unique individual that society or even himself cannot truly understand.

The Coen brothers manipulate the crime genre with The Big Lebowski to evaluate the nature of easily definable characters and expand on these characters true selves through credibility and empathy created in certain scenes. Introductory scenes for both the Dude and Mr. Lebowski focus on the assessment given to their characters by society before the audience gets to determine how they truly behave. After these introductory scenes, empathy is rendered for characters through the scenes illustrating hardships and destruction. Furthering the evolution of characters, the first dream sequence expands on The Dude's true self. These elements combine into the masterpiece that is The Big Lebowski, a cult film that can either exhibits a stoner dealing with life or a man trapped by his previous style of life.