

Unforgiven analysis – closing sequence essay



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Through out Unforgiven, visual, sound and setting elements are used to create meaning. This is especially true in the final sequence in which visual elements illustrate the meaning and state of beings of characters and the situation. The closing sequence involves William Munney living up to the perceptions made of him through out the film and cold heartedly murdering Little Bill and his men. This is an act of revenge for them killing his partner Ned Logan for the murder of the cowboy who attacked the prostitute.

The intention of the director seemed to be to show the true characterization of William Munney as he lives up to his reputation. Visual elements helped to create this meaning. One way that this was done was through the use of camera shots, and general frame composition. Camera shots from the view point of William Munney are used which shows the cow boys drinking, vulnerable and unaware.

This is done to give Munney a very powerful status as he is in control of the situation. This emphasizes the hard going dominant characterization that is suddenly present in William Munney's Personality. The composition at this time also creates significant meaning, in the foreground of the point of view shot, a gun can be seen rising which gives Munney even more power and control in the scene. The exact placing of the gun could hold expressionist meaning as the barrel crosses over Little Bill, showing Munney's inner intension to kill Little Bill.

There is also the significance of this inanimate object for the western Genre, guns are part of the western iconography and represent power, control and perhaps immoral intensions which is certainly the case for Bill Munney. A

deep focus is also used, this means that the foreground and background are both in focus and can both be seen clearly. This has the effect that this all adds up to the exposition of William Munny's true self which the audience hears reference to throughout but does not actually see. Camera Angles are also used to show that Little Bill also has power and importance in the scene.

Low angle shots are used to make him look bigger and more dominant in the frame, as if he is competing with William Munny, which in fact he is. The use of sound is used to create meaning and contributes greatly to the mood and atmosphere in the scene. A specific example is the use of external diegetic sound, Thunder and rain can be constantly heard which creates the overall atmosphere of danger and uncertainty which is predominantly present in the scene. It also works on a deeper level and shows the inner state of the characters, this is known as pathetic fallacy, and the uncertainty of the rain and the danger and power behind the thunder shows the inner unstable, dangerous and uncertain motivation present in the characters. The use of lighting also creates significant meaning in the scene and adds significantly to the atmosphere and reasoning on screen.

Dark shadows and the use of reds and orange, like the external diegetic sound, indicate danger and uncertainty. Specifically the lighting on William Munny's face shows him becoming darker, and more evil as when he is about to shoot, half his face is in shadow. This communicates to the audience the true inner state of William Munny and motivates them to reevaluate how they perceive him as a character, as there is great contrast with the William Munny at the beginning and the William Munny now. The location of the scene is standard of a western genre, a stereotypical saloon

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that is part of the mythology we perceive as the Wild West. This holds little meaning in terms of the themes of the film, however it does mean that a large amount of significant iconography is used that communicates to the audience the time and social situation of the characters.

Hard working men struggling to survive in an inhospitable land and where in occasion there only means of survival is to kill those who are trying to kill them. Examples of this iconography are the working ranch clothes all the men are wearing, the guns every man is carrying and the work horses seen frequently. Perhaps the most significant creation of meaning in the film comes through the performance of the actors and there body language. The meaning created through body language is the total contrast which is present between Little Bill and Will Munney. Clint Eastwood plays Munney in a very minimalist style, this is done to communicate to the audience the lack of emotion and feeling he possesses.

His actions are precise and void of any emotion. He is calm at all times and does not show any regret or anger. This is done to show that he is a " man who can keep his head". This is a contrast with Little Bill who, even though he remains calm and fearless in front of Munney, he is more emotive and genuinely cares for the lives of these men, there is great surprise when Munney defies Little Bill and shoots Skinny.

In conclusion the closing sequence in Unforgiven uses every possible outlet to communicate to the audience the true characterization of William Munney, this scene acts as a pay off to the way Munney has been built up throughout the film. It turns out possibly to the audiences surprise that he is

actually capable of the rumors that follow him. So through significant elements it is successfully communicated to the audience that William Munney is in fact an evil hero.