

Textual analysis of music video

Business



Die Another Day: Madonna Music Video The product carries no institutional or other identification, but the music appearance of Madonna present it as a 3 1/2 minute music video promoting the single Die Another Day. This text is intrinsically inter-textual: it is the theme to the James Bond feature film of the same name.

Movie audiences will see a completely different set of images set to the same music at the start of the film. Knowingly, the video presents Madonna in the role which Bond inhabits during the film's opening titles: that of the spy being interrogated and tortured by an oppressive regime.

The harsh single bulb in the familiar interrogators' angle-poise lamp parodies the more flattering spotlight Madonna would normally expect to stand in. As is common to many music videos, a narrative of sorts is presented: Madonna has been captured and is being tortured for information. Her internal battle over whether or not to tell them what they want to know is represented by a fencing match between 'two' Madonnas – one in white, one in black on a blood-red catwalk – and this is inter-cut with the supposed real world of Madonna's incarceration. The colours suggest this is a fight between good and evil.

Wounds on both fencers – both sides of her internal conflict – are manifested physically on Madonna's body, connotating a powerful battle. At one point we observe the fencers within a broken mirror in her cell, seeming to represent the manifestation of a fractured personality. The lyrics also allude to this, as she sings: " Sigmund Freud – analyse this. " The narrative is more complex than the song lyrics and is packed with binary oppositions. The

black and white fencers are polar opposites; their (initially) graceful swordplay contrasts with the spy's brutal treatment.

The sole, beautiful woman is detained by a group of ugly men; she is from the West while her captors are from the East (as in the feature film). Throughout the video Madonna is defiant: as well as fighting her captors, her face and body express determination and control. The lyrics proclaim that she will keep her secret and yet die another day. As she is strapped into the electric chair, she laughs and spits in the face of her enemy. The video simultaneously plays with its two genres (Bond films and music video) and subverts them.

Madonna, famous for her glamour and tight control of her image here allows herself to be presented bruised and bloody, in a grim, dark cell.

The film stock appears to have been desaturated to be almost monochromatic, suggesting hopelessness. This narrative also abandons the typical 'Bond Girl' damsel-in-distress approach, and re-casts the woman (not girl) as the hero. The mise-en-scene is atypical of both Bond films and certainly music videos. Unusually the video references the new film's plot without including any footage from it.

The fencers battle in two settings: the first, a white echo of the set from the feature film in which Bond and his nemesis do battle; the second a black-walled museum, peppered with specific iconography (the Gold-painted girl, Odd Job's hat) from early Bond films.

The two fencers destroy the museum in their battle. This could be said to both celebrate and knock the early Bond films which were popular yet

misogynistic. It could also be read as Madonna breaking the Bond mould: she is no Shirley Bassey. The stabbing of a portrait of Pierce Brosnan, the current Bond in this music video, suggests a level of ambivalence towards the project.

The song itself is sparsely arranged: a fusion of forceful dance/techno conventions in a minor key with the (synthesized) strings characteristic of a James Bond score overlaid.

More conventionally, Madonna addresses us, the audience, through most of the video, miming to the lyrics, breaking the fourth wall. She also dances aggressively and provocatively, and while this is to be expected in a music video, it is slightly at odds with the violent setting. Identifying the audience for this text is surprisingly challenging.

Madonna's audience has aged and matured as she has, and her record sales suggest she is less appealing to today's teenagers. The video's purpose is to promote both the single and the feature film.

More subtly, it is to promote Madonna's role in the film: she plays the fencing instructor (another layer of inter-textuality). However, its violence and blood may not have sat well on Saturday morning children's television (a prime broadcast slot for music videos) and this may have affected its reach. The video is too unconventional to be targeted at young teenagers and children; it is more likely pitched at an older audience, say 20-35 year-olds.

Neither the song nor the video seem calculated to appeal to traditional Bond fans, many older people being disappointed by the theme. The ending presents the white fencer defeating the black.

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Her body falls to the floor as the executioner trips the power. The intended reading is ambiguous: is Madonna dead? The white fencer of her hallucination still stands. As the smoke clears an empty chair is revealed, leaving us with several enigma codes: how does Madonna evade electrocution; who is the man seen sitting, momentarily, in her place; and what does the Arabic-style tattoo left behind on the chair mean?