

Purgatory in a Cemetery

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Article Received: 21/04/2023

Article Revised: 11/05/2023

Article Accepted: 15/05/2023

Published Online: 16/05/2023

DOI:10.47311/IJOES.2023.5.05.78

Abstract:

The paper aims to critically examine the character development showcased in the movie, *The Good, The Bad and The Ugly* with special emphasis on the Mexican Standoff sequence, in light of Italy's changing economic and political strategies post the Second World War through into the 1960s. I shall be doing this through a metaphorical understanding of the transformation in Northern and Southern Italy, Post World War II.

Keywords: cemetery, purgatory, showcased, world war, metaphorical

The paper aims to critically examine the character development showcased in the movie, *The Good, The Bad and The Ugly* with special emphasis on the Mexican Standoff sequence, in light of Italy's changing economic and political strategies post the Second World War through into the 1960s.

Mussolini's reign saw the Fascism being shunned in favor of a Republican outlook. As a result of this Industrialization brought great profits and development in the Northern part of Italy while the Southern region remained in a state of famine. The Italian film industry was no exception to this rule as pioneers such as Federico Fellini, Luchino Visconti and Pier Paolo Pasolini emerged as leading filmmakers. Their movies were often screened at various film festivals and dealt with themes that spawned out of the tumult of Industrial Age, in scripts starkly resembling the lifestyle of the English Industrial age. The Southern Part of Italy still lacked a director which it could identify itself with. That director was to be Sergio Leone, the pioneer of the Spaghetti Western. Now before I proceed, I shall explain the term Spaghetti Western. It is a Western, the genre of movies featuring made famous by Hollywood, produced by Italians and shot primarily in Almeria, Spain.

Part I: Development of the American Western

The Western is a genre synonymous with American cinema usually set in an open landscape or a wilderness. Historiographically, a protagonist of a western embodies good virtue often seen in Arthurian Romances i.e. chivalry, courtesy, upholding social order in the

face of the nefarious forces of oppression. This was the formula used by American filmmakers until the 1950s. Poignant examples include Stagecoach (1939), My Darling Clementine (1946) and High Noon (1952). A shift from the good versus bad tone to a more morally ambiguous tone is the films of Antony Mann most notably The Naked Spur (1953), The Tin Star (1957) and Man of The West (1958). John Ford's later films such as The Searchers (1956) and Rio Bravo (1959) only consolidated the filmmaker's stance on a greyer and more somber perspective of The West. The most memorable role in this context was performed by John Wayne as Ethan Edwards in The Searchers who is out to save his niece from an Indian tribe, though when met with remonstrance from the girl who seems content living with the clan, he displays a chauvinistic motivation by freeing her from who he believes are the disruptors of his daily life.

Part II: The influence of Japanese cinema on the world stage

Meanwhile, the Japanese cinematic culture was reaching new heights under the visionary leadership of auteurs like Yasujiro Ozu, Masaki Kobayashi, Kenji Mizoguchi and Akira Kurosawa. While all of the maintained a humanist style in their director, it is Kurosawa's films which make use of naturalistic elements in a really effective manner. While the American films rely on unfolding their story with the help of dialogue, Kurosawa uses the composing movement in Beethoven like manner to substantiate his narrative. This allows for better display of expressionism from an actors' purview as well as breaks the fourth wall from the audience's perspective. The deduction of the spoken word takes away the instructive nature of the scene and solely relies on the spectator's interpretive faculty for the whole consummation of the descriptive force it wraps within itself.

Akira Kurosawa made and released the samurai movie Yojimbo in the year 1961 which starred Toshiro Mifune in the role of a Ronin (which means a master-less Samurai) caught in a turf war between two clans. His allegiance remains unclear until the end of the film, wherein he is able to side with both the clans ultimately disposing of them both to restore peace in the village before tarrying off. This character served as the prototype for the development of The Man with No Name played by Hollywood veteran Clint Eastwood. The Good, The Bad and The Ugly, released in 1966, is the third and final part of The Dollars Trilogy, the preceding parts of which are A Fistful of Dollars (1964) and For A Few Dollars More (1965). Although, chronologically, within the universe of the movies, it may serve as a prequel to the other two movies as the Man with No Name, finds the poncho he is seen donning in the other two movies, near the end of this movie.

The trilogy modeled after the definition of the Epic as stated by Aristotle in Poetics which can be summarized as a long poem, typically one derived from ancient oral tradition, narrating the deeds and adventures of heroic or legendary figures or the past history of a nation.

Part III: The relationship between the Three Characters

The Man with No Name or Blondie as he is referred to plays The Good in the movie. Angel

Eyes (played by Lee Van Cleef) and Tuco (played by Eli Wallach) play The Bad and The Ugly respectively. The 3 cowboys are out to recover for themselves a cashbox containing \$200,000 from a cemetery, the location of which is revealed to Blondie by a dying soldier. Each character bears idiosyncratic behavior representing their representative virtues. Blondie and Tuco share a partnership wherein Tuco act The Son and Blondie as the Holy Spirit of The Christian Holy Trinity.

The action of shooting off the rope whilst around Tuco's neck by Blondie requires perfect synchronization with Tuco's body movement. The duo embodies Southern Italian with their appearances and attires. Although, Leone's representation of relationship between the Son and The Holy Spirit deviates slightly this performs the dualistic function of ensuring story progression as well as enshrining the tumultuous state of Southern Italians, a radical perspective he created instead of the traditionalist norm. This is especially evident in the scene where the two partners have a tiff over pay cuts which results in Blondie misfiring as the tie-up doesn't seem to serve his best interests. This is also symbolic of the growing economic disparity between the Northern and Southern Italy.

Tuco, a bandit, responds in kind by reuniting with the former members of his posse. His initial attempts to intercept Blondie are thwarted by the army, which functionalizes in the movie as an element to veil the evils committed by the characters in the face of war, but he manages to capture him by tracking down the fires made by him. The change in attitude after the location of the cash box is revealed to his apparent adversary reveals in full light his delinquent traits. The confrontation with his brother further shows the conflict and confusion in the diasporic facets of the Christian faith which had sequestered the Italian church into many divisions.

Part IV: Tuco and Angel Eyes as representatives of a shifting ideology

Leone's takes the special exception by humanizing Tuco through the aforementioned sequence by giving him a concrete back story as it is revealed that Tuco has been away for nine years, turning rogue in the face of poverty and ascribing to actions befitting that nature. This sequence gives Tuco a vulnerable disposition from a humanist perspective, not seen in any other scene in The Dollars Trilogy. This sequence also enables the viewers to sympathize with his circumstantial compulsions. Thus, invoking an emotive connect with the character from the audience's point of view.

The Third member of The Trio, Angel Eyes, constitutes the Kantian ethic of capitalism. A professional gunslinger who says, "When I'm paid, I always follow my job through", before shooting his former employer on the orders of the person he was hired to assassinate. This is followed by a scene where he beats a woman in the line of duty to extract information. This is a practical example of Kant's theory of empirical realism which is a heightened form of transcendental idealism in the time of a capitalist influx. With his well kept look and precise dialogue, he is idiosyncratic of Northern Italian behavior in all his correspondences throughout the course of the movie.

Part V: The use of natural aesthetic and expressionism in the standoff

The style of direction in *The Mexican Standoff* with the three lead characters is verily unique. A master class which perfectly blends all elements of film form. As the take begins, Blondie walks out slowly in the traditional Leone wide shot. The key thing to note here is the characters' walk, the background score and the movement of the camera is all very slow, all elements merging as one to draw the audience's attention in the space of the shot that signifies something is about to happen. This creates a slow build up into the scene as though we, the audience, are in tune with music slowly rising as if a dance to the death is about to unfold.

Blondie places down the rock as we see a crash zoom which is a cue for the music to truly come into effect, like a conductor waving his baton to signal the music to start. The frame then cuts to the reaction of the other two men still using slow takes and cuts; however, it is still tied in with the music. The scene has no dialogue, as is the case with the American features, instead it relies on the visual relationship created on the screen as they trace where the other men are at all times. It is this that allows us as the audience to know where the characters are, what they are thinking, seeing and how they are feeling towards each other more importantly.

The men slowly in tune, with the music, begin to take their places, again as though a dance or a ballet unravels in front of us. The music slowly builds tighter as the men get closer to their final places and as the music hits its peak, we see a patented Leone extreme wide-shot, only when all the three elements on the screen are in motion. This firmly establishes the scene in semblance with the grand nature of the Morricone score; it reveals the distance between the men, showing them surrounded by graves in a triangular formation. It plays by the connexions established earlier in the film as in their final positions Blondie stands facing Tuco and Angel Eyes, a grave.

Then a silence ensues which is just disturbed by the sound of crows as though the three gunslingers are abiding by the norms underlaid by the Italian tradition of Omerta (which is the Southern Italian code of honor built on silence, non-cooperation with authorities, and non-interference in the illegal actions of others.) , followed by a medium shot of each character in their respective places at an over the shoulder angle to establish the triangle, making sure that the viewer never feels disoriented . The music slowly builds again and the takes slowly begin to speed up in synchronization with it. The shots gradually get closer and closer to the characters, from medium shots to close ups. The transition from extreme long shots to medium shots to close ups is achieved with a time span of seconds. The editing has gone from slow to fast, the music is building, and the movement on the screen is getting all faster, quicker and closer as if the spectator is being pushed closer to the screen. The drum sound like a battle-cry, the eyes give the expression of a trigger, the music continues to build at a feverish pitch, and the cuts continue to get faster and faster until they resemble a montage of faces and hands. The cameras are panned directly into the characters' eyes. It should be noted that in this sequence of rapid camera movement, Blondie and Tuco maintain consistent eye contact as if their partnership has re-established amidst all the excitement and intensity.(4)

Blondie shoots Angel Eyes with a BANG! as the music draws to a close. This is reminiscent of any classic Leone as heavy emphasis is laid on the buildup of an action which often in a swift and decisive manner. Therefore, the takes get slow again and revert to a standard medium sharp frame. And, with Blondie walking towards the center where he placed the rock, after shooting Angel Eyes a second time and into the grave marking the end of the standoff, smiling almost mimicking the staid expression he had in the beginning of the sequence. This scene is the definition of a movie, it take the viewer on an entire story arc in a 5 minute segment.

The ferocity of the slow build culminates in the restoration of equilibrium in the sensory mechanism of the viewer. It gives the impression of a perfectly harmonized orchestral composition. Aside from re-defining entertainment value it also addresses the issues raised by the script in an adequate manner. The identity of the Southern Italian sympathized with, throughout the length of the film is restored in the final sequence where Tuco is unable to get his hands on the fortune in gold coins as Blondie as the guardian angel leaves him with his hands cuffed to his back. Tuco's brazen spirit in the face of travesty becomes the newly discovered soul of Southern Italy engaged in an effort to save and preserve their culture in the face of the neo-westernization of Italy. This is signified by the aberrant death of Angel Eyes.

Leone also crafted a movie that not only holds the essence of the Southern Italian culture but is also credited for revolutionizing the quality of various other genres of film. By blending a tried and trusted American formula with the innovative usage of the aesthetics in the Japanese narrative, Leone made a benchmark in cinematic history that will continue to entertain and enthrall a multitude of cinephiles for generations to come.

Therefore, it comes as no surprise that The Good, The Bad and The Ugly is synonymous with setting the standards of World Cinema. It is considered by many to be the finest spaghetti western ever made.

Further possible studies can be made of The Man with No Name as an Epic Hero in the mould of Aristotle across the trilogy as his is the only character which has a constant persona in all three parts. Another possible study is the comparative analysis portrayal of characters in the American Westerns, Japanese Samurai films and the Italian Spaghetti Westerns based on each country's literature, fictional and non-fictional, history, politics, various forms of culture etc.

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