
***Unforgiven*, Clint Eastwood, 1992**

In Clint Eastwood's *Unforgiven*, the Frontier has been reached and crossed a long while ago. It's 1880, and the little town of Big Whisky only relives the old times of the West through the visit of the occasional gunslinger, when he takes a serious beating from its sadistic marshal 'Little Bill' Dagget (Gene Hackman) before being sent away. The feat of arms of those shady characters of old are now the stuff of poor mimics (when two characters resolve a political difference by shooting geese instead of each other), of pulp magazines, and of near-constant bragging from a number of characters, each one more obnoxious than his predecessor.

In a town where the sheriff prohibits wearing firearms, however, harsh retribution is considered as trouble-making. So when one of the local prostitutes is slashed for laughing inappropriately, the whole brothel bands up to muster a ransom, and give those responsible a taste of the old days.

The duty falls on William Munny (Clint Eastwood), and former partner Ned Logan (Morgan Freeman), both recruited out of retirement by a green kid trying to experience his romantic visions of the West, and the need to provide for their own family. From that point on, the film then deals with William Munny's progressive realisation, and acceptance that the reenactment of his former role as a professional killer cannot be performed without expressing its most violent talents.

Eastwood excels at this task, showing with a minimalistic tone all the restraints, soothing and humili-

ations that age, moral struggles and basically every other person living in these modern times has inflicted upon such a fierce and violent figurehead : Munny has lost his aim, falls sick, and seems to bring a storm in with him every time he steps into Big Whisky. So he fights through this ordeal for his children, repeating to himself that he has changed, and "isn't like that any more", thanks to his former wife's influence, only to get beaten to a pulp at his first confrontation with Little Bill.

But the action remains low-key, and never indulges in pity or ridicule. Eastwood's character even has the modesty of dealing with his guilt in dreams, evoking his torturing past only in the odd conversation with his partner. The old gunslingers even show glimpses of their old romantic characters amidst their doom of mediocrity (Munny allows an enemy party to bring water to a dying man, and Ned, though tortured, never gives up his friend).

So it is brutally that Munny finally realises how the animal part of the killer he is cannot be repressed, leading to a final scene that shows a mastery for dramatic, long, and breath-taking action sequences. And while Munny shows us that vengeance cannot be held back in the real West, it is really with this final acceptance of himself that he can leave his former wife's grave, shown as his anchor from the very first image of the movie, and live peacefully and prosperously with his children. A masterful portrait of the Western outlaw.