

# The Buffalo Film Seminars



**Directed and produced by** Clint Eastwood  
**Written by** David Webb Peoples  
**Original Music by** Lennie Niehaus  
**Cinematography by** Jack N. Green  
**Film Editing by** Joel Cox  
**Casting by** Phyllis Huffman

Clint Eastwood...William 'Bill' Munny  
Gene Hackman...Little Bill Daggett  
Morgan Freeman...Ned Logan  
Richard Harris...English Bob  
Jaimz Woolvett...The Schofield Kid  
Saul Rubinek...W.W. Beauchamp  
Frances Fisher...Strawberry Alice  
Anna Levine...Delilah Fitzgerald  
David Mucci...Quick Mike  
Rob Campbell...Davey Bunting  
Anthony James...Skinny Dubois  
Tara Frederick...Little Sue  
Beverley Elliott...Silky  
Liisa Repo-Martell...Faith  
Josie Smith...Crow Creek Kate

**Academy Awards** for best director, best picture, best film editing and best supporting actor (Hackman). Nominations for best actor (Eastwood), best art decoration-set decoration, cinematography, sound, and screenplay.

## Selected for the National Film Registry, 2004

**CLINT EASTWOOD** (31 May 1930, San Francisco, California) has directed 33 films, acted in 66, and produced 28. The most recent was *Changeling* (in post-production, D). Some of the others are *Tony Bennett: The Music Never Ends* (2007, P), *Letters from Iwo Jima* (2006, DP), *Flags of Our Fathers* (2006, DP), *Mystic River* (2003, DP), *Million Dollar Baby* (2004, ADP), *Space Cowboys* (2000, ADP), *Absolute Power* (1997, ADP), *Midnight in the Garden of Good and Evil* (1997, DP), *The Bridges of Madison County* (1995, ADP), *A Perfect World* (1993, ADP), *In the Line of Fire* (1993, A), *Unforgiven* (1992, ADP), *White Hunter Black Heart* (1990, ADP), *Pink Cadillac* (1989, A), *The Dead Pool* (1988, A), *Bird* (1988, DP), *Heartbreak Ridge* (1986, ADP), *Pale Rider* (1985, ADP), *Tightrope* (1984, AP), *Sudden Impact* (1983, ADP), *Honkytonk Man* (1982, ADP), *Firefox* (1982, ADP), *Any Which Way You Can* (1980, A), *Bronco Billy* (1980, AD), *Escape from Alcatraz* (1979, A), *Every Which Way But Loose* (1978, A), *The Gauntlet* (1977, AD), *The Enforcer* (1976, A), *The Outlaw*

April 15, 2008 (XVI:13)

Clint Eastwood UNFORGIVEN 1992 131 min.



*Josey Wales* (1976, AD), *The Eiger Sanction* (1975, AD), *Thunderbolt and Lightfoot* (1974, A), *Breezy* (1973, D), *Magnum Force* (1973, A), *High Plains Drifter* (1973, AD), *Dirty Harry* (1971, A), *Play Misty for Me* (1971, AD), *The Beguiled* (1971, AD), *Paint Your Wagon* (1969, A), *Coogan's Bluff* (1968, A), *Hang 'Em High* (1968, A), *Il Buono, il brutto, il cattivo/The Good, the Bad and the Ugly* (1966, A), *Per qualche dollaro in più/For a Few Dollars More* (1965, A), *Per un pugno di dollari/A Fistful of Dollars* (1964, A), *Lafayette Escadrille* (1958, A), *Lady Godiva of Coventry* (1955, A), *Francis in the Navy* (1955, A) and *Revenge of the Creature* (1955, A). Early in his career he appeared in a number of tv series, most notably "Rawhide" (217 episodes, 1959-1965, A). He directed the "Piano Blues" episode of Martin Scorsese's "The Blues" miniseries (2003). He composed the scores for *Grace Is Gone* (2007), *Flags of Our Fathers* (2006), *Million Dollar Baby* (2004), *Mystic River* (2003) and *Space Cowboys* (2000). He wrote the theme song for *Unforgiven*. He won best directing and best picture Oscars for *Million Dollar Baby* (2004) and *Unforgiven* and was nominated for Best Director and Best Picture for *Letters from Iwo Jima* (2006) and *Mystic River* (2003). He was nominated for best acting Oscars for *Million Dollar Baby* and *Unforgiven*.

**DAVID WEBB PEOPLES** (1940, Middletown, Connecticut) has written 10 screenplays: *Soldier* (1998), *Twelve Monkeys* (1995), *Hero* (1992), *Unforgiven* (1992), *Fatal Sky* (1990), *The Blood of Heroes* (1989), *Leviathan* (1989), *Ladyhawke* (1985), *Blade Runner* (1982) and *The Day After Trinity* (1981).

**GENE HACKMAN** (30 January 1930, San Bernardino, California) has appeared in 99 films and TV programs, among them *The Royal Tenenbaums* (2001), *Enemy of the State* (1998), *Absolute Power* (1997), *Get Shorty* (1995), *Crimson Tide* (1995), *Wyatt Earp* (1994), *The Firm* (1993), *Unforgiven* (1992), *Class Action* (1991), *Postcards from the Edge* (1990), *Mississippi Burning* (1988), *Another Woman* (1988), *Bat\*21* (1988), *No Way Out* (1987), *Superman IV: The Quest for Peace* (1987), *Hoosiers* (1986), *Under Fire* (1983), *Reds* (1981), *Superman II* (1980), *Superman* (1978), *A Bridge Too Far* (1977), *Night Moves* (1975), *French Connection II* (1975), *Young Frankenstein* (1974), *The Conversation* (1974), *Scarecrow* (1973), *The Poseidon Adventure* (1972), *Cisco Pike* (1972), *The French Connection* (1971), *I Never Sang for My Father* (1970), *Marooned* (1969), *Downhill Racer* (1969), *The Gypsy Moths* (1969), *Bonnie and Clyde* (1967), *Lilith* (1964), "East Side/West Side" (1963), "Route 66" (1963) and "Naked City" (1963). He won a best support Oscar for *Unforgiven*, best actor for *The French Connection*, and was nominated for *Mississippi Burning*, *I Never Sang for My Father*, and *Bonnie and Clyde*.

**MORGAN FREEMAN** (1 June 1937, Memphis, Tennessee) has acted in 86 films and tv programs, four of them now in pre-production and two in post-production. Some of the released films are *The Bucket List* (2007), *Evan Almighty* (2007), *Lucky Number Slevin* (2006), *An Unfinished Life* (2005), *Batman Begins* (2005), *Million Dollar Baby* (2004), *Bruce Almighty* (2003), *The Sum of All Fears* (2002), *Under Suspicion* (2000), *Amistad* (1997), *Se7en* (1995), *The Shawshank Redemption* (1994), *Unforgiven* (1992), *Robin Hood: Prince of Thieves* (1991), *The Bonfire of the Vanities* (1990), *Glory* (1989), *Driving Miss Daisy* (1989), *Street Smart* (1987), *Brubaker* (1980) and *The Pawnbroker* (1964). He won a best supporting Oscar for *Million Dollar Baby* and was nominated for best actor for *The Shawshank Redemption* and *Driving Miss Daisy*, and best supporting actor for *Street Smart*.

**RICHARD HARRIS** (1 October 1930, Limerick, Ireland—25 October 2002, London, England, Hodgkin's disease) appeared in 78 films and television programs, among them *Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets* (2002), *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone* (2001), *Gladiator* (2000), *Smilla's Sense of Snow* (1997), *Unforgiven* (1992), *Mack the Knife* (1990), *Triumphs of a Man Called Horse* (1982), *Tarzan, the Ape Man* (1981), *The Wild Geese* (1978), *Orca* (1977), *The Return of a Man Called Horse* (1976), *Cromwell* (1970), *A Man Called Horse* (1970), *The Molly Maguires* (1970), *Camelot* (1967), *Hawaii* (1966), *The Heroes of Telemark* (1965), *Major Dundee* (1965), *This Sporting Life* (1963), *Mutiny on the Bounty* (1962), *The Guns of Navarone* (1961), *The Wreck of the Mary Deare* (1959) and *Shake Hands with the Devil* (1959)

**CLINT EASTWOOD** from The St. James Film Directors Encyclopedia. Ed Andrew Sarris. Visible Ink, Detroit/NY/Toronto/London, 1998. entry by Andrew Tudor.

Clint Eastwood. American. Education Oakland Technical High School, Los Angeles City College 1953-54. Military Service

Drafted into US Army 1950. Married Maggie Johnson, 1953 (divorced, 1980, one son, one daughter). Career Under contract with Universal 1954-55; sporadic work in film, late 1950s; played Rowdy Yates in TV series *Rawhide*, 1959-65; went to Europe to make three highly successful westerns with Sergio Leone, 1965; returned to US, 1967; formed Malpas Production Company and directed first film, *Play Misty for Me*, 1971; first effort as producer, *Firefox*, 1982; mayor of Carmel, CA, 1968-88. Awards Chevalier des Lettres, France, 1985; Academy Awards, Best director and Best Picture, for *Unforgiven*, 1992. Fellowship of British Film Institute, 1993.

In 1992, after almost forty years in the business, Clint Eastwood finally received Oscar recognition. *Unforgiven* brought him the awards for Best Achievement in Directing and for Best Picture, along with a nomination for Best Actor. Indeed, this strikingly powerful Western as nominated for no fewer than nine Academy Awards, Gene Hackman collecting Best Supporting Actor for his performance as the movies ruthless marshall "Little Bill" Daggett, and Joel Cox taking the Oscar for editing. It seems appropriate, therefore, that this film, which brought him such recognition, should end with the inscription "Dedicated to Sergio and Don." For without the intervention and influence of his two "mentors," directors Sergio Leone and Don Siegel, it is difficult to imagine Eastwood achieving his present respectability, let alone emerging as the only major star of the modern era who has become a better director than he ever was an actor.

That is not to belittle Eastwood, who has always been generous in crediting Leone and Siegel, and who is certainly far more than a passive inheritor of their directorial visions. Even in his *Rawhide* days of the 1950s and early 1960s he wanted to direct; more than once Eastwood has told of his attempts to persuade the series' producers to let him shoot some of the action rather more ambitiously than as the TV norm. Not surprisingly, they were reluctant, but they did in the end allow him to make trailers for upcoming episodes. He was not to take on a full-fledged directorial challenge until 1971 with *Play Misty for Me*, but in the intervening years he had become a massive box-office attraction as an actor, first with Leone in Europe in the three famous and founding "spaghetti westerns," and then in a series of films with Siegel back in the United States, most significantly *Dirty Harry*.

It is not easy to untangle the respective influences of his mentors. In general terms, because they both contributed to the formation of Eastwood's distinctive screen persona, they helped him to crystallise an image which, as a director, he would often use as a foil. The Italian Westerns' "man with no name," and his more anguished urban equivalent given expression in *Dirty Harry*'s eponymous anti-hero. have provided Eastwood with well-established and economical starting characters for so many of his performances. In directing himself, furthermore, he has used that persona with a degree of irony and distance. Sometimes, especially in his Westerns, that has meant leaning toward stylization and almost operatic exaggeration (*High Plains Drifter*, *Pale Rider*, the last section of *Unforgiven*), though rarely reaching Leone's extremes of delirious overstatement. On other occasions, it has seen him play on the tension between the seemingly assertive masculinity of the Eastwood image and the strong female characters who are so often featured in his films (*Play Misty for Me*, *The Gauntlet*, *Heartbreak Ridge*, and in part at least, *The Bridges of Madison County*). It is, of course, notoriously difficult to both direct and star in a movie. Where Eastwood has succeeded in that combination (not always the case)

it has depended significantly on his inventive building on the Eastwood persona.

It is important to give Eastwood full credit for his inventiveness in any attempt to assess his work. His better films as a director have a richness to them, not just stylistically—though in those respects he has learned well from Leone’s concern with lighting and composition and from Siegel’s way with in-frame movement, editing, and tight narration—but also a moral complexity which belies the one-dimensionality of the Eastwood image. The protagonists in his better films, like Josey Wales in *The Outlaw Josey Wales*, Highway in *Heartbreak Ridge*, Munny in *Unforgiven*, even Charlie Parker in the flawed *Bird* are not simple men either in their virtues or their failings. Eastwood’s fondness for narratives of revenge and redemption, furthermore, allows him to draw upon a rich generic vein in American cinema, a tradition with a built-in potential for character development and for evoking human complexity without giving way to art-film portentousness.

In these respects, Eastwood is the modern inheritor of traditional Hollywood directorial values, once epitomised in the transparent style of a John Ford, Howard Hawks, or John Huston (himself the subject of Eastwood’s *White Hunter, Black Heart*), and passed on to Eastwood by that next generation carrier of the tradition, Don Siegel. For these filmmakers, as for Eastwood, the action movie, the Western, the thriller were opportunities to explore character, motivation, and human frailty within a framework of accessible entertainment. Of course, all of them were capable of “quieter” films, harnessing the same commitment to craft, the same attention to detail, in the service of less action-driven narratives, just as Eastwood has done most recently with *The Bridges of Madison County*. But in the end their and Eastwood’s real art was to draw upon Hollywood’s genre traditions and make of them unique and perceptive studies of human beings under stress. Though his directorial career has been uneven, at his best Eastwood has proved a more than worthy carrier of this flame.

**from *Unforgiven*. Edward Buscombe. bfi Publishing, London, 2004.**

*Unforgiven* opens with a sunset. Outlined against the red sky, a man is digging a grave beside a lonely shack on the prairie, beneath a solitary tree. Sunsets have a special resonance in the Western. It’s the time of day by which you have to get out of town or else, a tradition that goes back at least as far as Owen Wister’s seminal novel, *The Virginian*, first published in 1903. In ‘Duel at Sundown’, the title of a 1959 episode of the TV series *Maverick* in which Clint Eastwood appeared as a boastful gunslinger, he gives James Garner just such an ultimatum. But there’s more to it than that. The sun sets, after all, in the west; that’s the direction across the map the pioneers are always travelling, but it’s also metaphorically the direction we’re all travelling (‘We all have it coming, Kid’). One way or another, Westerns are always about death.

Hence the mood of melancholy with which so many of them are tinged. But this may also derive from the fact that Westerns are set in the past, a past that is gone for ever, cannot be recovered, and so there is often a sense that something has been lost. In the 1960s the mood of nostalgia deepened....

During the 1960s, nostalgia extended from regret at the passing of the west toward the genre itself. The production of Westerns in Hollywood fell steeply, down to a mere eleven in 1963, barely ten percent of what it had been ten years earlier. For

a time this decline was masked by the unexpected phenomenon of the Italian Western, in which, as everyone knows, Clint Eastwood made his name as *The Man with No Name*. John Ford, informed by fellow Western director Burt Kennedy that Westerns were now being made in Italy, could only respond, “You’re kidding.” But the several hundred spaghetti Westerns made in the middle of the 1960s helped revive Hollywood’s own contribution, not so much in absolute numbers, which remained stuck at an annual figure of twenty or so, but in terms of themes and styles. Peckinpah’s *The Wild Bunch*, coming at the end of the decade, is inconceivable without the stylised violence and ideological disillusion of Sergio Leone’s films.

Yet the revival was temporary. As the 1970s progressed, the Western slipped to the margins of Hollywood production. there may be many reasons for this. Audience demographics were changing, with younger filmgoers finding the genre old-fashioned compared

to science fiction or the newly reinvigorated horror film. The death or retirement of the genre’s greatest stars accelerated the decline. *Ride the High Country* had been Randolph Scott’s last performance. None of the other major stars continued beyond the 1970s. Henry Fonda’s last Western was an Italian production, *Il mio nome è Nessuno* in 1973. John Wayne and James Stewart made their last Western together, *The Shootist*, in 1976. It was directed by Don Siegel, and its story, of an elderly gunfighter who knows he is dying, could scarcely be more appropriate, either to Wayne’s own career (he was in fact dying of cancer at the time) or to the melancholy mood of the genre.

The ideological framework within which the Western has had to work has shifted markedly since John Ford’s high-water mark in the mid-1950s; already by the 1970s many of its certainties were being undermined. In particular, the central figure of the hero, confident in his masculinity and physical prowess, the man who knows what a man’s gotta do, was threatened by an alliance of forces, of which feminism was only the most directly challenging. Even in the 1950s deep-seated faults in the bedrock of American society were causing cracks to appear in the previously impregnable male carapace of the male hero. In the remarkable series of Westerns directed by Anthony Mann and starring James Stewart, beginning with *Winchester ’73* in 1950, the Western hero is a troubled figure. in the grip of powerful, even irrational obsessions, his emotions barely under control. In the middle of the decade, John Ford’s magisterial *The Searchers* (1956) cast John Wayne, the embodiment of all that was most dependable and uncomplicated, as a man driven to near madness



by his hatreds. Even works by lesser directors, such as Edward Dmytryk's *Warlock* (1959), featured heroes, in this case the saintly Henry Fonda, whose motivations were complex and actions not always admirable.

By the 1970s, heroism itself seemed a troubled concept. Westerns were now full of anti-heroes such as the comic figure of Jack Crabb in *Little Big Man* (1970), forever changing sides in an attempt to avoid confrontations. Robert Altman's demythologising *Buffalo Bill and the Indians* (1976) exposed the venality and cynicism involved in the creation of William Frederick Cody, who first saw the full possibilities of the west as a commodity, as packaged entertainment. Mel Brooks's irreverent satire, *Blazing Saddles* (1974), sent up the whole genre. There had been parodies before, but they had been affectionate; for Brooks nothing was sacred. The historical foundations of the genre also came under systematic attack in films that debunked the real-life figures that previous decades had so assiduously built up. In *Doc* (1971) it was Wyatt Earp and Doc Holliday, in *Dirty Little Billy* (1972) Billy the Kid, in *The Great Northfield Minnesota Raid* (1972) it was Jesse James.

In the parallel field of the history of the west, the triumphalist version of western history informed by the notion of manifest destiny, the idea that the white race had a God-given right, even a duty, to expand into the lands which it misleadingly called 'virgin' but which were already the preserve of native or Latino peoples. was already being questioned in the 1970s. Possibly this was propelled by events in Vietnam, which undermined America's imperialist ambitions. In 1987 Patricia Nelson Limerick's *The Legacy of Conquest* mounted a full-scale assault upon the theories of westward expansion that had so far dominated the field and which originated in the so-called 'frontier thesis', first formulated by Frederick Jackson Turner in 1893. Limerick charged that this account (which saw America's social and political virtues, identified as adaptability, ingenuity and energy, as deriving from the free and easy life of the frontier) left out a great deal, in particular the contribution of women and of ethnic minority groups, and was over-celebratory, ignoring much in the history of the west that was shameful or disastrous.

In this context, it seemed, only Clint Eastwood had the necessary star power and vitality to ensure the Western's survival. From his first leading role in a Hollywood Western, *Hang 'Em High* in 1968, he was to make a total of ten Westerns up to *Pale Rider* in 1985. If this could scarcely compare with the productivity of earlier stars (Randolph Scott made no fewer than thirty-nine Westerns between 1945 and 1962), it meant nevertheless that Eastwood was almost single-handedly carrying the genre upon his shoulders.

There is hardly space to trace in detail Eastwood's career as a Western hero, but what is most striking, beyond the deepening of the actor's and directors craft that has marked his progression, is the extent to which he has been alert to the shifts of tone and perspective which have been forced upon the genre over the past third of a century, as the result of changes both within the cinema and without.

As the above dates suggest, the Western film was in some respects in advance of the historians on the question of manifest destiny, having already done something to redress past imbalances in respect of the Indians and other ethnic groups, and readily acknowledging that the west was often a dark and dirty place. Eastwood's Westerns were alert to these currents from an early date. As we shall see, the role of women in his films, including his Westerns, underwent a subtle development over time. But in other

respects too his films did not simply recycle the traditional versions of the Western myth. In *Outlaw Josey Wales* (1976) Eastwood as the eponymous hero, starting as a loner, as Western heroes traditionally are, gradually collects around him a disparate group of individuals, who include several women, an elderly Cherokee with a delightfully ironic take on the role of the Indian, and a stray dog. *Bronco Billy* (1980), set in the present day, has Eastwood playing the owner of a wild west show whose innocent, even childish belief in 'Western' values, is tested almost to destruction by the cynicism of those around him. In *Pale Rider*, Eastwood's last Western before *Unforgiven*, his role is certainly heroic, leading a group of gold-miners in their struggle against a heartless corporation. But there is something ultimately unhealthy about the hero-worship he attracts, in particular from the young girl who convinces herself she is in love with him, while in its focus on hydraulic mining and the damage it does to the environment, the film echoes the increasing consensus of the 'new western historians' that economic development in the west was frequently rapacious and destructive.

What all these films indicate is that Eastwood has been alive to the changing social milieu in which the Western has had to make its way since 1970. One could not simply reproduce the old certainties, whether of masculine or white supremacy, or of progress. If the Western was to continue to be viable, it would need to be adapted to contemporary sensibilities, show that it was aware of its own past and in touch with the present. And that is precisely what *Unforgiven* tries to do, by turns drawing its strength from the roots of the genre, the accreted meanings of character and convention, but then always inflecting them, adapting them, subverting them to refashion the genre into something viable for the modern age....

Living in a society in which women's rights are minimal but where money talks (though ironically Wyoming, where the film is set, was the first state in the Union to give women the vote, in 1869), the prostitutes' only means to empower themselves in by buying justice, and so they decide to hire gunmen to act for them; they want personal vengeance; an eye for an eye, or more; in effect capital punishment but outside the law, a life in exchange for a disfiguration. Both cowboys involved in the attack are eventually murdered at the women's instigation, though one clearly has had only a minimal involvement and shows remorse. Yet though the roles of all the men involved in the unfolding of events, both heroes and villains, come under severe scrutiny, there's never any overt criticism of the women's actions. Implicitly the film sides with these women. It does not question their right to do what they do, only the motives and actions of those who perform on their behalf.



In this respect, *Unforgiven* seems to go against the grain of the genre. The Western is not celebrated for favoring women. Traditionally there's a limited range of roles on offer (young marriageable girl, wife, schoolteacher, whore), all of them subordinate....No one would claim Eastwood for feminism, but by the early 1990s his films had come a long way from the straightforward macho attitudes of *Dirty Harry* (1971). Eastwood has always been a canny player in the industry. When muscle men like Sylvester Stallone and Arnold Schwarzenegger were flaunting their torsos in the early 1980s with movies like the initial *Rambo First Blood* (1982) and *Conan the Barbarian* (1981), Eastwood had already moved on to *Bronco Billy*, an ironic take on the whole myth of the Western. By the time of *In the Line of Fire* (1993), when the Eastwood character shows a lack of respect for the presence of female agents in the secret service, agent Rene Russo is allowed to refer to him as a dinosaur....

One of the most pleasurable things about *Unforgiven* is the variety of different ways it finds to inflect a story that is in essence as generic as they come: a retired gunfighter is called out of retirement to do one last job. Ageing is a common enough theme in the Western. In Henry King's *The Gunfighter* (1950) Gregory Peck is Jimmy Ringo, a gunman who is looking to finally settle down. He's weary of the wandering life. Tragically, just at the moment he has made his decision, he's gunned down by just the sort of glory-hunting little punk he has been trying to avoid. In *The Searchers* John Wayne as Ethan is self-conscious about his age ('No need to call me sir, either, nor grandpa, nor Methuselah'). Both *Ride the High Country* and *The Shootist*, as we've seen, explore this theme, and in *Monte Walsh* (1970) Lee Marvin and Jack Palance are two ageing cowboys threatened by unemployment. So having Eastwood play a character who may be too old for heroics is not a novel idea. What's fresh is the ingenuity and subtlety with which it is played out.

Eastwood was over sixty when he made *Unforgiven*, and for the first time, perhaps, he looks his age. He has an emaciated look, the skin stretched tight on his face and the thinning hair greying and wispy. The film goes to some length to emphasise just how unheroic he is. ...

There's a consistent pattern to the opening of a Clint Eastwood Western. In *The Outlaw Josey Wales* the hero is a poor southern farmer who is attacked by northern guerillas during the Civil War. His wife is raped and murdered, his child killed, his farm burned. So Josey, at first seen peacefully ploughing his fields, is turned into an implacable pursuer of his assailants, thirsting for revenge. In *Pale Rider* he is a mysterious preacher, apparently a man of peace, who is persuaded, after witnessing a brutal assault on an unarmed man, to assist a group of miners against a large corporation which is attempting to drive them away. *Unforgiven* goes even further in emphasising the hero's unwillingness to get involved in the situation that confronts him. His life has been changed by the love of a good woman; he has left violence behind him. And he's too old anyway.

Of course it's not just Eastwood who has employed this structure. In his book *Sixguns and Society*, Will Wright identifies the hero's reluctance to get involved as a key constituent of the classical Western plot....

The hero's reluctance to pick up his gun provides tension and drama for the narrative. In terms of motivation there may be several reasons why the hero holds back. but there is always an underlying imperative. As we have seen, violence is necessary to the establishment of civilisation. Savagery and outlawry cannot be defeated by reason and good example alone. Yet the hero must not

be seen to relish violence. That would put him on a level with the lawless, with those he must overcome. His anger must be slow to burn, and when it comes to the boil he must have adequate cause. As so often in American cinema, it is the personal rather than the political that is the ultimate motivation. Men fight for families, for sweethearts, for friends, for property, but rarely in the Western for an abstract cause alone. The cause may give legitimacy to their violence, which has a redemptive quality beyond its merely contingent causation, but it is rarely enough to cause the hero to draw his gun....

Like Munny, his eventual nemesis, Dagget is a man with a past who is trying to live it down, and no more than Munny can he lay the demons to rest. At least he has the law on his side, his brutality covered with the fig-leaf of legal authority. Richard Schickel has suggested that in the conception of Daggett, Eastwood was aware of the Rodney King episode in 1991, in which an innocent black man was beaten in full view of a video camera by a phalanx of Los Angeles policemen. The role is thus in part conceived as a comment upon the abuse of authority, and this might suggest another aspect of *Unforgiven's* novelty, that it works against the stereotype of the upstanding lawman who strides through countless town-taming Westerns....

The last act...appears to overturn everything that the film has been working towards. Up to this point, the film has been developing a critique of the function of violence in the cinema and of the way that violence is portrayed. At every opportunity Munny himself has avowed his conversion to a peaceable life by his late wife, his renunciation of his former role of killer. Though he has by now been involved in the killing of two men, he has embarked on the mission only in desperation, in dire need of money. For his part, Ned has found that he can no longer, if he ever could, shoot a man he doesn't even know in cold blood. The Kid, full of bluster, has discovered the real nature of murder, has been traumatised by his assassination of a man caught literally with his trousers down. Even the whores seem taken aback by what their desire for vengeance has unleashed.

But now Munny himself is fired by that self-same lust for vengeance, fueled by the unaccustomed drink of whiskey. He turns before our very eyes into the cold-blooded killing machine he once was. As the thunder rumbles he rides through the black night and sheeting rain towards the lights of Greely's saloon, past the body of his friend, lit by a hellish light and adorned with a sign: 'this is what happens to assassins around here'....Eastwood is presented on the screen, the frequent menacing stares under the brim of his hat that are such a trademark, indicate that the capacity for violence is merely held in check, not renounced for ever. And so we are not surprised, indeed are even gratified, that having worked against the founding myth of the Western for most of its length, that strong and just men must use violence to impose order and civilisation, in the last reel *Unforgiven* reverts to tradition. If ever a film had its cake and ate it too, surely this is it....

Clint's stillness, his ability to do nothing but just be...helps give him presence. One of the most effective parts of his repertoire is the stare. Sometimes it's hostile, as with his terrifying glare at Little Bill as he enters the saloon for the final confrontation, at other times quizzical, as in his look at Delilah when she appears to offer him a 'free one'; at others stoical as when, after they have killed the second cowboy, the Kid cracks up and Will looks out towards the horizon. And often when we get this look, the framing gives it emphasis by obscuring the upper

part of Eastwood's face with a hat, just the eyes peering out from under the brim....

Does the last sequence of the film essentially recuperate whatever 'revisions' the film has made upon the conventions of the West, when the 'reformed' William Munny transforms himself into a righteous avenger and a murderous killer? William Beard believes so, asserting that 'Even the most deconstructive Eastwood film (and *Unforgiven* probably is that) retains what is deconstructed: the transcendental-heroic Eastwood persona. The films do not supplant a heroic discourse with an anti-heroic one. Rather they present both, contradictory, discourses side by side.' Paul Smith concurs: 'whatever kinds of revisionism are attempted (even if "truthful"), the mystified, mythological (and vicious) "spirit of the West" always returns. In other words, *Unforgiven* depicts the fiction returning in overpowering form to literally blow away the demythologizing truthfulness of the sheriff [as expressed in his testimony to W.W. Beauchamp].

Perhaps it would be asking a lot to expect a conclusion in which we witness William Munny facing up to the full implications of his volte-face, in which we are forced to share his despair at the betrayal of his wife in his drunken reversion to bloodshed. Hollywood does not often deal in such desolation. As it is, the ending in which Munny literally fades from the screen avoids the issue. The enigma with which Mrs Feathers [Munny's mother-in-law who returns to her dead daughter's grave to note that 'there was nothing on the marker to explain to Mrs Feathers why her only daughter had married a known thief and murderer, a man of notoriously vicious and intemperate disposition.'] is confronted is the audience's own. Munny's viciousness and his reformation cannot be reconciled.

**from Clint Eastwood *A Cultural Production*. Paul Smith. University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, Minnesota/London 1993.**

The press reviews paved the way for the film's opening success. Their general consensus was that *Unforgiven* is an unusual, "revisionist" western that reworks the traditional significations of the genre and, indeed, Eastwood's own work in westerns (it bears comparison in many respects to *High Plains Drifter* particularly). But the most signal claims made by the reviewers for this film suggest that it is a complex and meaningful work whose artistic qualities tend to transcend its generic



condition: the proposition is that *Unforgiven* constitutes a profound character study that carefully examines the moral issues of conscience and guilt in the context of the bloody ethos of the gunfighter or of the West in general. Perhaps the most convinced reviewer in this vein is Peter Travers in *Rolling Stone*, who concludes that this is the "most provocative western of Eastwood's career.... Eastwood gives *Unforgiven* a tragic stature that puts his own filmmaking past in critical and moral perspective. In three decades of climbing into the saddle, Eastwood has never ridden so tall" (20 Aug. 1992, 55-57)....

Indeed, like *Dead Pool* before it, *Unforgiven* suffers from being unable to criticize convincingly the very violence that it itself is involved in and that it does not shrink from representing. This inability also compromises one of the other strands of this supposedly thoughtful film. That is, through the character of Beauchamp, a writer of penny dreadfuls about the West (played by Saul Rubinek), the film's first part provides a critique of the mythologizing of the West and its fabled gunmen. This demystification is actually enacted in the encounter between the sheriff and another bounty hunter, English Bob (Richard Harris), when the sheriff rudely dismantles the latter's claims to fame for Beauchamp's benefit. The sheriff offers a supposedly "truthful" version of the West: its cowardly and vicious protagonists, its guns that don't work, its drunken and inept gunfights, and the like. In other words, the sheriff stands for a correction of the representations of the West that Beauchamp peddles. Rather than read *Unforgiven* as some critics do when they claim that this "revisionism" indicates that the film is joining with Beauchamp's and the sheriff's demythologizing attempt, one might just as easily understand it in a quite opposite way. That is, the film's discourse in this regard demonstrates that, whatever kinds of revisionism are attempted (even if "truthful"), the mystified, mythological (and vicious) "spirit of the West" always returns. In other words, *Unforgiven* depicts the fiction returning in overpowering form to literally blow away the demythologizing truthfulness of the sheriff.

However difficult it might be to credit the kinds of claims the tributary media make for this film, it is nonetheless the case that only a few reviewers were willing to subvert them.

**JUST 1 MORE IN THE SPRING 2008 BUFFALO FILM SEMINARS:**

April 22 Ingmar Bergman *THE SEVENTH SEAL* (1957)

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with support from the Robert and Patricia Colby Foundation