As a Western made after their popularity began to wane in the 70’s, all of the classical tropes played well out by that time, *Unforgiven* instead seeks to flip many of the tropes that Westerns once had on its head, deconstructing many of them – while managing to still reinforce some of them. Perhaps the most iconic way it does so is in Clint Eastwood’s acting and the overall arc of his character, who is a reformed killer by the name of Will Munny well past his prime and is shown to no longer be any good at the root’n-toot’n revolver shooting that was so typical for a cowboy to be shown competent at, much preferring a double barrel – and, hell, he’s not much of a cowboy either, given his lack of competency with his horse and the fact that he was a morally grey killer in his past in comparison to the genre’s norm of an honorable man righting some sense of wrong.

The only way that Will even resembles the old stereotype is, at the start, he’s reluctant to kill; this reluctance is gone once Logan is dead, however, and he is left alone, where he seems to finally regain his gun skills. The “savages” he seeks out to kill are other cowboys; the “innocent” town people are prostitutes (whose overt sexuality could be also seen as a subversion of the Western, and are given a bit more agency than typical women in a Western even if they’re still left out of the conflict itself), a pimp, and a former-cowboy-turned-sheriff who winds up being just as awful as the cowboys themselves in how they torture and kill Logan. In Eastwood’s portrayal of the Western within *Unforgiven*, there are none of the traditional racial lines for good and evil drawn.

All of the violence shown in the film, as well, is messy; gunfights are prolonged, with the protagonists, right up until the final showdown in Skinny’s whorehouse, frequently missing their shots unless at point blank. The only time, it seems, that Will is able to hit his shots is once he’s forsaken any sense of nobility or reluctance for his murdering, descending himself into the line of murderer he’d been eleven years prior. Eastwood is keen to show us, unlike what other Westerns may say, that killing isn’t clean, it isn’t pretty; there is no nobility or honor in the kind of lands that the Frontier was known for. In the end, it results in Will Munny forever leaving the wilderness for the comfort of the emerging modern world in San Francisco, apparently far preferring an even more domestic life than what the quiet of his failing farm had allowed for.

Word count: 452