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**Paper One**

I watched George Steven’s 1953 western feature film titled “Shane.” It has a run time of 117 minutes and tells the story of a mysterious lone rider and a professional gunslinger who saves the homesteaders from an evil cattle baron. It stars, Allan Ladd (Shane), Van Heflin (Joe Starrett), Brandon de Wilde (Joey Starrett), Emile Meyer (Rufus Ryker), Jean Arthur (Marian Starrett), and features Elisha Cook Jr. (Torrey) and Jack Palance (Wilson) among others. "Shane" is typical of the western genre as Stevens professionally endorses the myth of the west ranging from the themes, the hero character – who is usually a mysterious drifter and savior of the helpless, as well as the iconography and ideologies upon which the viewer’s perceptions of the West and Westerns are based. “Shane’s” archetypal western landscape amplifies the myth of the west which is iconized by vast lands of rough terrains and wilderness. Stevens achieves this through camera shots taken at different angles and vantage points. For instance, in the film’s opening scene, Shane, the drifter/hero and titular character is silhouetted from a long camera shot. He is presented against the backdrop of rough mountainous terrain visible on the horizon. Themes of frontier communities coupled with elements and concepts such as guns, violence, horses, saloons, and the hero’s sad departure which is representative of the western’s clash between free individualism and heroism saturate the Western iconography as presented in “Shane.” All these make the film a good one. I loved the ending scene despite it being a sad one as Joey calls out to his idolized hero begging him to stay. However, I did not like the negative presentation of women as inferior to the men and in need of their protection – but then again, this typical of the 1950s.

I loved George Stevens as a director and I am almost sure that anyone who watches “Shane” will most likely like him as much as I do if not more. I felt he had done the westerns great justice through this film. The film’s director’s professionalism is something that the audience establishes from the beginning to the end of the film. Nothing seems to be off balance – the storyline is clear, the characters fit their role perfectly and therefore do not give the audience a hard time trying to figure out what one’s role in the film is. The music is well balanced, and the voices and sounds do not overrun each other. The cinematography and rich iconography make the film all the more interesting. More importantly, Stevens has managed to present his title character in complete perfection and depiction of a western hero. He stands out from the onset to the end – there is no doubt that he is a mysterious man of unusual strength and skill. He may be a stranger to the land of the homesteaders, but he knows what justice is all about and that it should be served at all times and by all means. I think that of all the characters in the film, Shane played his role the best – there is no single moment when the viewer doubts Shane’s heroism. Even when he fails to retaliate to Ryker’s goon’s mockery, the audience justifies this a sign that the hero has a high degree of self-control. He is a character who inspires different emotions in the audience and fellow character – and this is what it means to be an all round character. In other words, he is dynamic and exciting too. Through him, Stevens tells an American history and the struggle that existed between the natives [represented by the homesteaders] and the colonizers/white men [represented by Ryker]. Shane is the voice of reason and calls for civilization and end to the injustices. The film is, therefore, an excellent example of its genre and period.

My Criteria For Quality In Film

1. A high-quality film has a good storyline that is both intriguing. In this case, the plot is clear and delivers a profound message that is easy for the audience to understand. I hate films where I struggle to decipher what the director intended to put across. With Stevens in “Shane,” the plot is clear, and the message is deep but direct and easy to grasp.
2. An excellent film also has excellent actors and cinematography. It is imperative to note that no matter how good the story might be, poor execution by the actors greatly undermines the quality. Therefore, for it to meet the quality standards, each character must play their role outstandingly well, enough to convince the audience that they are indeed the character they are portraying. The camera crew must also capture the scenes in ways that best illustrates the film’s story; just like “Shane’s” camera crew does by varying the camera shots accordingly to fit specific scenes.
3. A good film has an appropriate setting. Different genres require different settings, For example, Westerns such as “Shane” require to be set in the open, rough terrains which are a perfect fit for this genre. Therefore, matching the genre to its setting is a plus for high quality.
4. Also, a top level film is one that has an awesome scene. It could be in the opening, somewhere in the middle, but most preferably the ending. It presents a moment that the audience lives to remember. For the ending scene, it gives a turn that the viewer did not expect. Like in “Shane” no one expected the hero to be shot and drift away to die alone.
5. Over and above all these, composition and organization remains paramount. This gives a balance to all the other requirements. Otherwise, a film may have an excellent story, actors, setting, and awesome scenes but if it lacks proper organization, then there is nothing much to say about it.

Works Cited

Stevens, George. "Shane (1953)". *IMDb*. N.p., 2016. Web. 4 Apr. 2016.