

Gran Torino Exam (#02)

Assignment:

1. Based on the script (Material 1) and screenshots (Material 2), analyse how the different field sizes are used in the given scene to convey the story.
2. Compare the given scene to the final confrontation with the gang in “Gran Torino” in which Walt is killed, considering storytelling, character and filmmaking.

“A Fistful of Dollars” (Italian: Per un pugno di dollari) is a 1964 “spaghetti” Western film directed by Sergio Leone and starring Clint Eastwood in his first leading role.

(https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/A_Fistful_of_Dollars)

Context: Joe, a stranger, arrives in the town of San Miguel, a place ridden with crime and gang violence. To help the townspeople, he plays off the gangs against each other. In a final confrontation near the end of the film, he has to face Ramon Rojo and the rest of his gang to free Silvanito, who has been captured by the gang. We as the audience do not know how he is planning to do that.

Access to Material 2:

Short Link: <https://t1p.de/yvyl>

Password:

LFT-2025



Material 1

EXTERIOR – DAY – DESERTED TOWN

[...]

Ramon and four members of his gang see Joe on the town road. Ramon raises his rifle to aim at Joe.

RAMON (shouts): Gringo!

Ramon smiles.

JOE: I heard you wanted to see me.

Joe remains calm and crosses the road.

RAMON (to himself): The Americano's dead.

Ramon aims at Joe.

JOE: Cut the old man down. [Footnote: Joe is referring to Silvanito, who the gang is holding captive and who has been tied to a building.]

Ramon shoots his rifle at Joe. Joe falls to the ground. The gang smile. But suddenly they are bewildered as Joe gets back up again. He first struggles to stand, but then starts crossing the road back to the other side.

JOE: What's wrong, Ramon? You losing your touch?

Ramon locks and loads his rifle and shoots again.

Joe is hit, but only stumbles briefly. The gang are confused. Joe keeps walking.

JOE: Are you afraid, Ramon? Shoot to kill, you better hit the heart, Ramon.

Ramon locks and loads his rifle again.

JOE: Your own words, Ramon.

Ramon aims and shoots twice. Joe is hit and falls to the ground. The gang nervously watch him get up again. Joe continues walking to the other side.

JOE: The heart, Ramon. Don't forget the heart.

The gang cannot believe their eyes. Are they seeing a ghost?

JOE: Aim for the heart or you'll never stop me.

Ramon shoots and hits Joe another three times. Joe tumbles backwards against a few piled-up barrels. Ramon smiles, it is a mixture of excitement and terror.

But Joe gets up again. Ramon locks and loads his rifle and pulls the trigger, but he is out of bullets.

Joe walks towards him and stops. He throws back his poncho to reveal that he has been wearing a plate of solid metal as protection. The dents the bullets made are clearly visible. Joe drops the metal plate to the ground. Ramon and his gang stare at him in disbelief.

How the scene ends:

The opponents stare at each other. Then Ramon reaches for his revolver, and so do the gang, but Joe is faster and shoots all of the gang members but Ramon. He then confronts Roman in a final duel and kills him.

Lösungsvorschläge

1. Based on the script and screenshots, analyse how the different field sizes are used in the given scene to convey the story.
 - The shots (and respectively the field sizes) of the gang are much closer than those of Joe.
 - There are mostly close-ups and medium close-ups of Ramon and his gang. There is even an extreme close-up of Ramon towards the end of the scene.
 - The shots of Joe, on the other hand, are all long shots, with the exception of the last shot of Joe in the given excerpt.
 - As a consequence, the narrative perspective is not neutral but rather a subjective point of view: We see the entire scene from the gang's perspective. We can clearly see their faces and their emotional responses (first satisfied when Joe is shot, then confused and bewildered when they realise that he is not hurt).
 - Joe, on the other hand, can only be seen from a distance. We can read his body language (surprisingly calm) and we hear in his voice that he is not afraid. But we cannot make out any subtleties or expressions in his face – he is just too far away.
 - The choice of field sizes and thus narrative perspective has the effect we as an audience are as ignorant about what Joe is up to as the gangsters. Suspense is created by the fact that Joe is seemingly putting himself into great danger: He is outnumbered, one of the gangsters is already pointing his rifle at him. Surprise and

bewilderment are felt by the audience just as well as by the gangsters when Joe is shot but not hurt. And the reveal of Joe's improvised armour comes as a surprise to both the gangsters and the audience at the same time.

- The shot when the trick is revealed is the first shot in which Joe is seen more closely, it is a medium shot and then a medium close-up. (The shots of Ramon are still closer than those.)
- It is an unusual choice to put the viewer into the perspective of the villains, but in this case it results in the creation of suspense and a satisfying and humorous surprise.

2. Compare the given scene to the final confrontation with the gang in "Gran Torino" in which Walt is killed, considering storytelling, character and filmmaking.

Both scenes are surprisingly similar:

- In both scenes, the protagonist has become involved with a group of criminals who are troubling other people. Both Joe and Walt choose to be involved, even though they could have stayed out of trouble. Both risk their lives to help other people. Both seem to be experienced in confidently dealing with violence. Both seem to be fearless, which seems to bewilder the villains in both cases, because they are used to being intimidating.
- In the given scenes themselves, Joe and Walt both confront a group of criminals directly. In both cases the

odds seem to be against them: they are outnumbered, their lives are in danger.

- In both scenes, the audience does not know what is going to happen. Suspense is created by putting the protagonists in these dangerous situations. Both Joe and Walt have guns pointed at them while they are both out in the open with no shelter.
- In both scenes, the Eastwood characters act in a manner that is both confusing and cool. The way they talk to their adversaries seems out of place, provocative. Joe gives Ramon advice how to shoot him and allows him to shoot him. Walt “shoots” the gangster with his gestures of his hand and finger.
- Both scenes lead to the defeat of the villains: In “A Fistful of Dollars” they are killed, in “Gran Torino” they go to prison.
- In both scenes, the protagonist uses a trick that is surprising to both the audiences and his adversaries. In both cases the trick is used to bring about justice, because the respective justice system has failed. Both are in a way vigilantes. Both are in control of a seemingly dangerous situation.
- While the settings seem at least a century apart, the Detroit setting in spirit is not far removed from the wild west border town / ghost town: Breakdown of society, lawlessness, everyday gun violence.
- Both characters use conversation to provoke and offend their opponents: Joe questions Ramon’s ability to shoot, while Walt chooses a strategy of provocation, including

racial and homophobic slurs, but also condemnation of the rape of Sue.

- The reveal of the metal plate in “Fistful” is quite similar to the reveal of the lighter in “Torino”. Both shots clearly draw attention to those objects by using a closer field size and some camera panning.

However, there are also some considerable differences between the scenes:

- The scene from “Fistful” is set in broad daylight, while the one from “Torino” is set at night. However, the western ghost town works a scary setting just as well as the night scene in Detroit.
- While Joe survives, Walt is killed, albeit by his own choice.
- While Joe risks his young life, Walt is terminally ill and chooses to sacrifice the little time he has left to what he thinks is right.
- Joe is a classic vigilante who takes the law in his own hand and uses gun violence to achieve his aims. He acts within the laws of the west. All his killings are technically in self-defense, because he never draws or shoots first.
- Walt, even though he is a war veteran, has a lot of experience with violence, has killed people in the Korean War, and owns a shotgun, does not resort to violence to finally solve the conflict. Quite on the contrary, he chooses to provoke violence against himself to carry out his plan.
- Filmmaking: Unlike in “Fistful”, the field sizes in “Torino” are more balanced. The shots of Walt are mostly a little

closer than those of the gang, but the difference is much smaller and in some cases might be due to the number of characters in the frame. In the conversation the shots range from medium long shots to medium close-ups. In all those shots, it is always possible to make out both facial expressions and upper body gestures, which are relevant to tell the story.

- There is no equivalent of the final shot of Walt in the western, because the story takes a very different route from here.