



Candidates must complete this page and then give this cover and their final version of the extended essay to their supervisor.

Candidate session number

Candidate name

School number

School name

Examination session (May or November)

May

Year

2012

Diploma Programme subject in which this extended essay is registered: IB Film

(For an extended essay in the area of languages, state the language and whether it is group 1 or group 2.)

Title of the extended essay: Michael Cimino: Genius or Jerk? A comparison  
between Heavens Gate and The Deer Hunter

### Candidate's declaration

*This declaration must be signed by the candidate; otherwise a grade may not be issued.*

The extended essay I am submitting is my own work (apart from guidance allowed by the International Baccalaureate).

I have acknowledged each use of the words, graphics or ideas of another person, whether written, oral or visual.

I am aware that the word limit for all extended essays is 4000 words and that examiners are not required to read beyond this limit.

This is the final version of my extended essay.

Candidate's signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: 16/12/11

## Supervisor's report and declaration

The supervisor must complete this report, sign the declaration and then give the final version of the extended essay, with this cover attached, to the Diploma Programme coordinator.

Name of supervisor (CAPITAL letters) \_\_\_\_\_

Please comment, as appropriate, on the candidate's performance, the context in which the candidate undertook the research for the extended essay, any difficulties encountered and how these were overcome (see page 13 of the extended essay guide). The concluding interview (viva voce) may provide useful information. These comments can help the examiner award a level for criterion K (holistic judgment). Do not comment on any adverse personal circumstances that may have affected the candidate. If the amount of time spent with the candidate was zero, you must state this.

\_\_\_\_\_ is one of the most committed film students that I have ever taught and his passion for the subject was evident throughout the planning and writing process. Producing the essay was both a challenge and a delight for him. I enjoyed my regular meetings with him as they invariably led to lively and interesting discussion. He was conscientious and always met deadlines. \_\_\_\_\_ has always read widely on film and thus the research process was a kind of second nature for him. At our meetings he was always keen to show me new sources he had found and to explain how repeated watching of the films had given him new insights.

He was an exemplary Extended Essay student.



\_\_\_\_\_ extended essay that will be submitted to the examiner.

To the best of my knowledge, the extended essay is the authentic work of the candidate.

I spent  hours with the candidate discussing the progress of the extended essay.

Supervisor's signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

16/12/2011



**Assessment form (for examiner use only)**

Candidate session number

**Achievement level**

**Criteria**

	Examiner 1	maximum	Examiner 2	maximum	Examiner 3
A research question	2	2		2	
B introduction	2	2		2	
C investigation	3	4		4	
D knowledge and understanding	4	4		4	
E reasoned argument	3	4		4	
F analysis and evaluation	2	4		4	
G use of subject language	3	4		4	
H conclusion	1	2		2	
I formal presentation	2	4		4	
J abstract	1	2		2	
K holistic judgment	2	4		4	
Total out of 36	25				

Name of examiner 1: \_\_\_\_\_  
(CAPITAL letters)

Examiner number: \_\_\_\_\_

Name of examiner 2: \_\_\_\_\_  
(CAPITAL letters)

Examiner number: \_\_\_\_\_

Name of examiner 3: \_\_\_\_\_  
(CAPITAL letters)

Examiner number: \_\_\_\_\_

IB Cardiff use only: B:           

IB Cardiff use only: A: 104465

Date: 16/5

IB Film

Extended Essay

Michael Cimino: Genius or Jerk? A comparison  
between *Heaven's Gate* and *The Deer Hunter*

How does the failure of Michael Cimino's *Heaven's Gate* represent the need to contain a director's talent and control the making of a film in order for it to reach success the likes of Cimino's other film, *The Deer Hunter*?

The candidate is clearly engaged  
& enthusiastic. Knowledge & understanding of  
the two films & analysis is very laudable.  
However the essay as a whole reads more like  
an esoteric rant & lacks precision / depth & detail  
as regards textual analysis & awareness of specific  
issues. The candidate does drift away from the  
main points at times.

(Mentioned in material  
should have been worked  
into the body of the essay to be  
effective - & not as an appendix.  
The illustrations are not given any  
direct purpose or analysis.  
They appear to be merely  
decorative.

November 2012

Word Count: 3971

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Abstract (292 Words)

✓ The purpose of this essay is to investigate the relationship between Michael Cimino's titanic flop *Heaven's Gate*, a film that managed to drive its studio United Artists into bankruptcy and his 1978 Oscar winner *The Deer Hunter*. Despite the completely differing critical responses the two films garnered, there are stylistic and directorial similarities in the two epics. Although *Heaven's Gate* is a widely recognized phenomenon of production catastrophe and a directors' meticulous attempt at making a masterpiece, the film is much like a beautiful canvas that was rushed along by studio executives.

A little excessive? ✓  
I have empathy for Cimino, and his noble approach to such an ambitious project. To me, he stands as the cinematic Mozart of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Cimino remains as a director who reached a climactic moment of fame for less than a year and lost it all in the chaos of his own creative ambition. I can't imagine anything more admirable than an artist who wouldn't give up.

✓ In the wake of United Artists' collapse there was nobody who was willing to give *Heaven's Gate* a second chance. Now that the past has settled, it seems that a film of such high ambition is an excellent case study for how a movie must be constructed in order to be accepted by its contemporary audience and how even genius needs to be contained in order to reach success. I did extensive research on Cimino's rise and fall, and studied both of his films with the intention of proving that *Heaven's Gate* is not the disaster that many view it as. Steven Bach's book on the making of *Heaven's Gate* as well as a documentary on the subject and Cimino's two big films themselves were the most essential means of my research.

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Introduction: Cimino, Zsigmund and the power they earned and lost as Auteurs

Michael Cimino only directed 8 films in his 35-year career as a filmmaker.<sup>1</sup> Two remain notable. One garnered the Oscar for film of the year in 1978 and made Cimino a household name. This provided him the same critical acclaim and studio control as any auteur the likes of Francis Ford Coppola, or Martin Scorsese. The other film quickly became notorious in 1980 for being the biggest flop in Hollywood history. *The Deer Hunter* seemed to do everything right. *Heavens Gate* did everything wrong.

Needs to  
not stand  
alone.

In 1919, Mary Pickford, D.W Griffith, and Charlie Chaplin founded United Artists; a film studio run by filmmakers for filmmakers.<sup>2</sup> It progressively became the melting pot for the exposure of young, new filmmakers. In the 1970's and 1980's, United Artists funded filmmakers such as Woody Allen for his film *Manhattan* and Martin Scorsese's 1980 classic *Raging Bull*. With the help of Clint Eastwood,

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necessary



Cimino had his directorial debut with *Thunderbolt and Lightfoot*, a film that won him enough critical acclaim to permit him to carry on to film *The Deer Hunter*. Within the year of *The Deer Hunter's* success, it was a matter of time before Cimino garnered auteur status in Hollywood and would make his own United Artists masterpiece.

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<sup>1</sup> Michael Cimino - IMDb. *The Internet Movie Database (IMDb)*. Web. 18 May 2011. <<http://www.imdb.com/name/nm0001047/>>.  
<sup>2</sup> *Final Cut: The Making and Unmaking of Heavens Gate*. Dir. Michael Epstein. Perf. Willem Dafoe. Trio, 2004. DVD.



Cimino found a particular interest in the Johnson County War, an odd event in U.S history that resulted in the genocide of eastern European immigrants in 1890's Wyoming. Steven Bach explains in his chronicle of the Cimino disaster, *Final Cut: Art, Money, and Ego in the Making of Heaven's Gate, the Film that Sank United Artists*, that within the first week, Cimino "was ten days and fifteen pages behind. He had by then used up two hours of film, less than three minutes of which he was willing to approve." (Bach, Pg. 6). When Cimino "finally delivered *Heaven's Gate*, a year and a half late, it had cost five times as much as he said it would."<sup>3</sup> (Bach, Pg. 7) Cimino's titan of a film rose to a 44 million dollar budget and earned less than 3 million dollars domestically. *Heavens Gate* managed to sink United Artists and Cimino single handedly diminished auteur director status in Hollywood forever.

Cimino was given permission to make *Heaven's Gate*, and by the time United Artists noticed that something was going terribly wrong, the succubus had already begun, and there was nothing left to do but hope that the situation might turn itself around somehow. United Artists was cornered. Cancelling the project of a recent Oscar winning director would cast a negative light on the studio but continuing to film had unknown consequences. Today, *Heaven's Gate* is synonymous to ego and

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<sup>3</sup> Bach, Steven. *Final Cut: Art, Money, and Ego in the Making of Heaven's Gate, the Film That Sank United Artists*. New York: Newmarket, 1999.



uncontrolled disaster. In Robert Schnakenberg's biography *Christopher Walken: from A to Z*, the film is recognized as "the most beautiful worst movie of all time".<sup>4</sup> (Schnakenberg, Pg. 85) In a compilation of movie reviews edited by Peter Rainer titled *Love and Hisses: The National Society of Film Critics Sound off on the Hottest Movie Controversies*, statements are made that Cimino's "level of craftsmanship could scarcely be higher"<sup>5</sup> (Thomas, pg. 214) in *Heavens Gate*.



Not an  
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attribution

Needs to  
be  
the film!  
or use them  
effectively

A film with such high expectations, such an immense production and such a powerful cast went straight down the drain. How did Cimino fail on such a large scale? How did the film not manage to impress audiences, and what could be said to counter the negative criticism on Cimino's - misunderstood - catastrophe? In order to thoroughly understand Cimino's intentions for *Heaven's Gate*, a leap two years back would be required in order to take a closer look at *The Deer Hunter*.

<sup>4</sup> Schnakenberg, Robert. *Christopher Walken a to Z: the Man, the Movies, the Legend*. Philadelphia: Quirk, 2008.

<sup>5</sup> Rainer, Peter. *Love and Hisses: the National Society of Film Critics Sound off on the Hottest Movie Controversies*. San Francisco: Mercury House, 1992.

The Deer Hunter: The Director, The Ensemble, The Fame, And The Celebration

Thomas Ian Griffith explains in his analysis of Cimino's Oscar winning Vietnam epos that

*"From the very beginning director Michael Cimino intended The Deer Hunter to be viewed as a tale of friendship. He once said, "The war is really incidental to the development of the characters and their story. It's part of their lives and just that, nothing more." The distance of 25 years allows the viewer to see more clearly what audiences of the time still sensitive to the bruise of Vietnam backlash might have missed. Of course the indelible performances make it that much easier; no amount of time can change the strength of Cimino's up-and-coming ensemble cast or leave a doubt as to why the film earned Christopher Walken an Oscar, did so much to advance the career of Meryl Streep, or cement DeNiro's reputation as one of the finest actors on the planet. Time, the great equalizer, has blown the dust off The Deer Hunter and exposed its heart."*<sup>6</sup>

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Kajst  
grated

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Cimino's story of the power of friendship and the horrors of war is undeniably one of the most provocative and captivating films of the 1970's. The film transports the viewer into a working class town in

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Pumpkin

<sup>6</sup> Griffith, Thomas I. "The Deer Hunter." *Thomas Ian Griffith*. Web. 16 May 2011. <[http://www.tigriffith.com/griffith\\_movies.htm](http://www.tigriffith.com/griffith_movies.htm)>.

Pennsylvania where the audience encounters Michael, Nick and Steven. The three friends exchange expressions of friendly affection during their last day before their departure to Vietnam, which is spent at Steven's wedding. Vilmos Zsigmund took the role of director of photography; he had previously worked on the Spielberg classic *Close Encounters of the Third Kind* and the grueling Burt Reynolds camping horror trip *Deliverance*. Zsigmund's technique and proficiency with the camera is second to none, and established him as one of the finest cameramen in Hollywood.

KA

*The Deer Hunter* is split into three acts. The first covers the life of the three friends prior to their Vietnam traumas. This segment is extremely generous with the amount of time it spends establishing an intimacy between protagonists. It seems as if Zsigmund's masterful imagery captivated Cimino to such an extent that he had no choice but to include every clip. Steven Schiff writes in *Love And Hisses* about the film, and explains that the opening act is "too long, but it has a rooted, documentary tone, and watching it is like leafing through old family photographs."<sup>7</sup> (Pg. 479)

These ideas need to be supported by further textual evidence

The first act eventually ends after a long, light-hearted party scene with song and dance. This is elaborately filmed, and Cimino's artistic vision becomes evident through the character placing and shot



KA

framing. This is one of the many elements he later expands on in *Heaven's Gate*.

Although it appears to serve little purpose in the film, it carries a few of the

<sup>7</sup> Rainer, Peter. *Love and Hisses: the National Society of Film Critics Sound off on the Hottest Movie Controversies*. San Francisco: Mercury House, 1992.

fundamental elements that are relevant within the final acts. Ironic signals of patriotism are attributed with the protagonists and the powerful character relationships are established. Although the party scene serves to emphasize these elements along with DeNiro's relationship with Streep's character, the scenes most significant element is its bleak contrast with the steel workers factory and the Vietnamese jungle.

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The factory provides a backdrop to the protagonists' homes and serves as a symbol of the dangers they have yet to encounter. What comes across most poignantly in the film is that the wedding party could have been cut down to half its length without losing much of its content. What Cimino does excellently although with a far too leisurely pace, is cement the stoic, bold and grey industrial landscape in the viewers mind and thus uses this light-hearted opening to emphasize the horror that they have yet to face in Vietnam. When the film takes its powerful jump to its second half, the viewer is struck with the lush greens of the Vietnamese jungle. The switch is unforeseen and surprising, but within the next few minutes, when the burning Vietnamese landscape is thrown at the audience, one can't help but feel like they're "seeing a distorted-mirror image of the blast furnace back in Pennsylvania." (Schiff, Pg. 480)

✓  
Some  
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*The Deer Hunter* finds its success in areas such as its ensemble cast and its sincere message, an element that Cimino fails to nail on the head in *Heaven's Gate*. Cimino's

success does not lie in the film's script, nor was it the camerawork that wooed audiences despite Zsigmond's unmatched proficiency in the field. Christopher Walken explains that Cimino "was smart, and hired lots of theatre actors, especially from New York. There was a brotherly bond"<sup>8</sup> (Schnakenberg, Pg. 59), which is what ultimately led to the believability that Nick, Steve and Michael had known each other for quite some time. It had never been as clear as with Cimino that the audiences across the globe were either speechlessly impressed or speechlessly upset at the film's message. For contemporary audiences of 1978, Vietnam was as real as it could get, and with films like *Coming Home* and *Forced Entry* released prior to *The Deer Hunter*, cinemagoers watched Vietnam films to see themselves and loved ones.



<sup>8</sup> Schnakenberg, Robert. *Christopher Walken a to Z: the Man, the Movies, the Legend*. Philadelphia: Quirk, 2008.

Cimino was far ahead of his time with *The Deer Hunter* because of his intentional lack of a political opinion. The primary focus was on the characters lives, and although there were racist undertones due to the Vietcong's representation in the film, the success was due to its tale of friendship. Jane Fonda "charged that *The Deer Hunter* was a racist film that represented the Pentagon's view of Vietnam",<sup>9</sup> (Levy, Pg. 353) but the film was an undeniable success for its shocking, slightly non-conformist and tragic, yet interesting new look on a genre that had been filmed countless times before.

reads  
easily  
fully  
true



Purple

Cimino was right, *The Deer Hunter* was a film, "not a newsreel" (Levy, Pg. 353) and although it was as long as an unedited documentary or news broadcast, it was groundbreaking and ahead of it's time. It was simply misinterpreted, and one could argue the same for *Heaven's Gate*.

<sup>9</sup> Levy, Emanuel. *All about Oscar: the History and Politics of the Academy Awards*. New York: Continuum, 2003.

## Heavens Gate: The egomaniac, The "Ensemble", The Disaster, And The Slaughter

*The Deer Hunter* wasn't without its own share of controversy, which can be what fueled the self-indulgent and meticulous process of the making of *Heaven's Gate*. American and Vietnamese protestors demonstrated at the Academy



Awards in 1978. People were upset that *The Deer Hunter* was honored despite its racist undertones and that Cimino had violated "both historical truth and artistic responsibility" (Levy, Pg. 353). It was undeniable that Cimino had cemented his name in Hollywood, and with the help of United Artists, Cimino was willing to prove to those who doubted his abilities that he deserved the Best Director Oscar, and so he went out to make a masterpiece, a film so great that Cimino would be more than just a name. Cimino pitched to become the next Orson Welles, and his very own *Citizen Kane* was going to knock everybody off of his or her feet.

"By 1979, Auteurs were no longer a wise advantage. Peter Bogdanovich had permanently damaged his career with *At Long Last Love* [...] even Martin Scorsese and Steven Spielberg had suffered setbacks. *New York, New York* and *1941*" (Final Cut, Documentary). Stories arose of Cimino's incessant striving for perfection and his meticulous attention to detail. Entire town sets were built and then torn down. Every single shot was Cimino's struggle for perfection. Brad Dourif, an actor on *Heaven's Gate* explains in an interview, "I'm not used to seeing 57 takes, [...] I'm not used to doing a minimum of 32 takes" and Sandra Jordan, the key costumer stated that "I could honestly say that we all thought we were making the next *Gone With The*

*Wind*". The general issue derived from the absolute control Cimino had over production. Zsigmund himself stated that "there was no one on set to tell Cimino 'ok, move on' [...] so he was his own boss basically". In the following months, bad press would follow on *Heaven's Gate*, trashing any consideration for the artistic value of the film.<sup>10</sup>

Because nobody was there to contain Cimino's genius and vision, Cimino made a number of errors with his film. Over the course of the 1960's and 1970's, the European Western had forever changed the way people viewed the genre. The classic



American Western had been replaced for a darker and grittier film. People went to the cinema expecting to see a Leone western, and therefore Cimino's extremely political film came as a shock for moviegoers who expected an epic Western about genocide in Wyoming. Ultimately, *Heaven's Gate* was not that film, and thus people witnessed three hours of romance and politics without any lone wolf and showdowns. Another considerable error was the use of a softening filter for the entire film. Five years prior to *Heaven's Gate*, Stanley Kubrick released *Barry Lyndon*, a three-hour film that used a softening filter in order for the film to mimic 18<sup>th</sup> century artworks and send people into a cinematic version of Thomas Gainsborough's art.<sup>11</sup> Ultimately, this filter did not stand the test of time for Cimino, essentially due to the fact that it was almost

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<sup>10</sup> *Final Cut: The Making and Unmaking of Heavens Gate*. Dir. Michael Epstein. Perf. Willem Dafoe. Trio, 2004. DVD.

<sup>11</sup> "Barry Lyndon (1975) - IMDb." *The Internet Movie Database (IMDb)*. Web. 17 May 2011. <<http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0072684/>>.



counter-productive to both the serious tone Cimino demanded and Western style that audiences expected.



Regardless of the amount of money and time that was put into the *Heaven's Gate*, the fundamental question remains whether or not Cimino made a good film. Zsigmond explains, "It was unusual the way he [Cimino] worked. He would actually paint by putting the extras in the right place. [...] He painted by picking up people and putting them in the right place." Due to this the film took on qualities that would resemble a painting that an artist would have drawn if he had been in Wyoming during the Johnson County War. When viewing the film, it becomes clear that the approach taken to the photography is almost in reverse to what a common director would do. Rather than creating actions between characters and then framing the shot, Cimino's shots were empty frames that were then filled with actors. Due to this a static shots and single frames appeared like paintings.

*Heaven's Gate* was not a good decision from a screenplay writer's point of view. After *The Deer Hunter's* critique for historical inaccuracy, it seemed a bad



decision to make another film that was based on real events. The key issue was that the western genre had died down over the years preceding *Heaven's Gate* and ironically, the patriotic John Wayne was the one to hand *Cimino* the Oscar in 1978.

Cimino never worked with an excellent script, and although *The Deer Hunter* was a raging success, the script itself was nowhere near perfection. Since there was no emotional attachment that audiences had to the Johnson County War, there was no reason for viewers to consider the brilliance of the film. *Heaven's Gate* might as well have been a work of complete fiction, which in some cases it was. The film suffered from a lackluster screenplay, and moments that were far too melodramatic, most notably the scene in which Christopher Walken writes his last words on a scrap of paper in a burning cabin and actually bothers to write up his full name. Cimino's craftsmanship is incredible in these scenes, however the film fails on the narrative completely.

Cimino's main failures were on two fronts: Casting and Post-Production. The elephant in the room during the screening was the inaudibility of the actual film. The premiere flopped because despite the films length, no connection could be established between the audience and the characters. Huppert was excellent in the film and played her role beautifully, but her French descent



made her voice difficult to comprehend, and considering the premiere ran without subtitles, audiences were forced to watch a 3-hour film that was largely incomprehensible. The soundtrack itself was absolutely magnificent, and although United Artists couldn't afford to use John Williams, and although Ennio Moricone fell asleep during the first business meeting, the newcomer David Mansfield did an astounding job at delivering the music.<sup>12</sup> Unfortunately, once again, an error in post-production rendered the films score almost entirely muffled. The films visuals were astounding, nobody was in doubt as to what the money was spent for, but the narrative landed straight on its face. The actors presented little chemistry in the film, and although Christopher Walken won an Oscar for his performance in *The Deer Hunter*, his skills remained unseen in *Heaven's Gate*.

*Heaven's Gate* fails completely on almost everything but the camerawork. The films key flaw seems to derive from Cimino's extreme focus on shot framing and his meticulous attention to details in order to recreate 1800's Wyoming as accurately as possible. Cimino's lack of attention to the film's script and his failure to successfully



<sup>12</sup> Bach, Steven. *Final Cut: Art, Money, and Ego in the Making of Heaven's Gate, the Film That Sank United Artists*. New York: Newmarket, 1999.

edit the film caused it to plummet to its demise. *Heaven's Gate*'s failure to relate with its audience was the ultimate letdown. Since Cimino had once again, told a story around a true event, he put himself at great risk. His second film was not the home run that *The Deer Hunter* was. There was no longer the charismatic cast and the unnecessarily long scenes were of no interest to the audience because they did not carry the light-hearted, familiar feel of family photo albums and happy memories. Cimino's dedication to creating cinema-history led to him creating a self-indulgent piece of work, something that wouldn't have happened had he been more careful or had less control on set. The film failed to remain memorable to moviegoers despite the beautiful landscape, picturesque framing and elegant direction, and so, the first reviews that came in named *Heaven's Gate* "an unqualified disaster" (Bach, Pg. 363)



### The Deer Hunter Vs. Heaven's Gate: The Wrongs, The Rights, And The Results

Cimino's intention to create a film for the ages might have backfired back in 1980, but his intentions deserve a second opinion, and therefore a second viewing. Essentially, *Heaven's Gate* tells the story of immigrants that struggle to survive in America, whilst *The Deer Hunter* tells the story of immigrants who struggle to survive in Vietnam and never manage to recover, thus creating a second struggle to re-integrate in America. Both films show similar trends in character models. The key differences are the brotherhood and sincerity that are felt in *The Deer Hunter* as opposed to the relatively emotionless love triangle in *Heaven's Gate*.



Dance and celebration plays an interesting set of roles in both films, and although they are different in their execution, it's interesting to see what they ultimately have in common. *The Deer Hunter* uses its wedding sequence in order to show the strong bond that Michael, Nick and Steve share, to allude towards the future Romance of Michael and Linda and to integrate the viewer in a tightly knit community. The hour-long prologue gives an extremely real and sincere feel to the film. This pays off in a film of friendship and trauma in order to contrast regular, everyday life with Vietnam. This same technique of long, seemingly unedited sequences doesn't function well in a western, especially one that's supposed to make audiences sympathize with Eastern European immigrants that steal cattle. The song and dance scene in the Heaven's Gate skating rink is incredible to say the least. Utilizing similar elements of light-hearted and un-choreographed dance, the scene is

essentially there to help the audience sympathize with the immigrants. The sequence itself is photographed far more elaborately than in *The Deer Hunter* with quickly paced montage, and a constantly moving dolly. An



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Piper?

interesting technique is that Cimino's camera moves counterclockwise whilst the characters dance clockwise and/or vice-versa. With this technique the background is in wonderful motion and the dance gains an incredible sense of momentum.

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The dance scene during the prologue of *Heaven's Gate* is also worthy to be viewed. The Harvard graduates waltzing around in the university square are also exceptionally filmed, but Cimino's most intelligent move is the striking similarity that this dance bears to the final showdown with the immigrants in Wyoming. The two and a half hour time gap between the two scenes distorts the comparison but nevertheless the two scenes are beautifully similar. The comparison of dance and violence is an ingenious analogy and Cimino does an excellent job at fulfilling this

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task. The reason these scenes ultimately don't assist the overall opinion of the film is their meaninglessness. Although the dance in the skating rink is meant to make the immigrants more sympathetic, there is no need for the segment to be so long. The wedding in *The Deer Hunter* is also far too long, but the viewer can nevertheless see the relevance in the scene. Each scene in *Heaven's Gate* could be viewed individually, and blow away any audience member, but when put in context with the overall narrative, the scenes become confusing and stretched out. Cimino achieved what seem to be multiple short films that all look wonderful by themselves, but don't function when put together.



The cast is highly skilled in both films. The chemistry seems to work out incredibly well with DeNiro and Walken in *The Deer Hunter*. Unfortunately Huppert, Kristofferson and Walken don't build a credible love triangle in *Heaven's Gate*. The main reason for this is the muddled script. Although the dialogue is not memorable in *The Deer Hunter*, it's the credibility of their misfortune that makes the film work. In *Heaven's Gate*, the love triangle falls flat due to the lack of a convincing confrontation between Walken and Kristofferson. Although both films have excellent camerawork, and although the editing is a little sloppier in *Heaven's Gate*, it's ultimately the actors' chemistry that lets the film down. Nevertheless, *Heaven's Gate*

builds an incredible town full of people, and although not every actor puts on an unforgettable performance, its actors such as Brad Dourif that propel the scenes into powerful sequences of rebellion and courage. *Heaven's Gate* simply falls short of the sincerity of *The Deer Hunter* despite the large scale of production and preparation that the actors underwent during filming.



Handwritten red text: "F P" and "P" with a flourish.

The final element that separates Cimino's masterpiece from Cimino's "masterpiece" is the relevance of the story to contemporary audiences and the execution of the stylistic elements in the film. Cimino made a bleak anti-western and although the material in the script is a bit thin, there is an undeniable sense of proficiency in the technical areas. What separates it from *The Deer Hunter* is ultimately that audiences could understand the hardships of Michael, Nick and Steve due to the actuality of the Vietnam War. In *The Deer Hunter*, the slow pacing is what pays off due to the contrast it offers to the average day life at home, the fast paced Russian roulette montages, and the pain of returning home alone after the war.

When viewing both films, Cimino undoubtedly made two excellent motion pictures for the history books. Due to inconsistencies in the script of *Heaven's Gate*



and its negative media coverage prior to its release, the film suffered from an unforgiving audience. Cimino's massive studio control caused his scrupulous attention to detail to take over the production process. Cimino was thinking big, and he could have created a work of genius, but even genius needs to be contained in cinema. A painter could spend years working on a canvas, but with film, time is money, and genius needs to be kept in check before the film inflates its budget.

Cimino proved that setting out to create a piece of film history ultimately turned out as an approach that leads to self-indulgent films. The use of softening filters, the casting of Isabelle Huppert, and the tacky script with an outdated topic and



genre are what got the better of Cimino. The film proves Cimino's potential and artistic genius, but had Cimino collaborated with more people on *Heaven's Gate*, he might have had more luck with its release.

As Kevin Thomas expresses in his review of *Heaven's Gate*, "now it is time to sit back and enjoy all that Michael Cimino has wrought"<sup>13</sup>, because calling this film "an unqualified disaster" would be a lie to any artist in the film industry of today, of yesterday and tomorrow. After all, Cimino enjoyed making long movies, and that doesn't mean that Cimino hasn't captured a sense of culture and sincerity in his epic.

<sup>13</sup> Rainer, Peter. *Love and Hisses: the National Society of Film Critics Sound off on the Hottest Movie Controversies*. San Francisco: Mercury House, 1992.

Cimino was indirectly blacklisted from Hollywood, and never managed to regain the fame he once had, ultimately proving that in the city of angels, success comes before talent.

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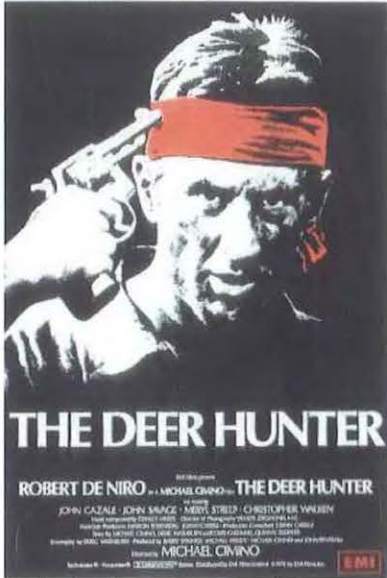
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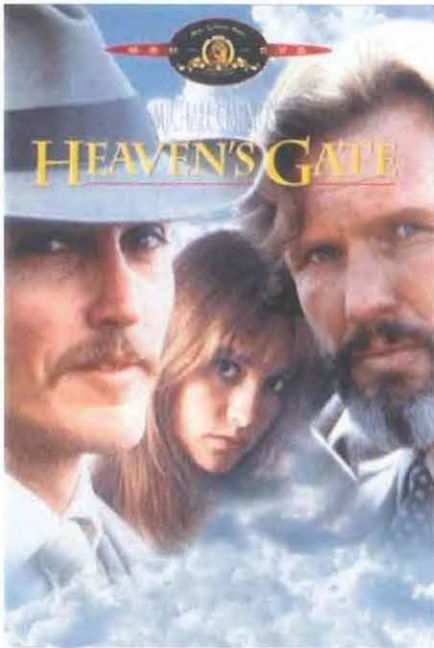
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**Table Of Images:**

**Appendix A**



**Appendix B**



Appendix C/D



Appendix E



Appendix F



Appendix G



Appendix H



Appendix I



**Appendix J**



**Appendix K**



**Appendix L**



Appendix M



Appendix N



Appendix O



Appendix P





Appendix Q



Appendix R



Appendix S



## Appendix T



Appendix A from  
<http://www.lib.washington.edu/media/oscars/motionpicture.html>  
Accessed May, 2011

Appendix B from  
<http://thisdistractedglobe.com/2010/02/14/heavens-gate/>  
Accessed May, 2011

Appendix E from  
<http://www.filmreference.com/Films-Dah-Deu/The-Deer-Hunter.html>  
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Appendix J from  
<http://www.filmreference.com/Actors-and-Actresses-Hu-Ke/Huppert-Isabelle.html>  
Accessed May, 2011

Appendix K from  
<http://www.filmreference.com/Directors-Bu-Co/Cimino-Michael.html>  
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Appendix C, D, F, G, H, I, L, M, N, O, P, Q, R, S, T  
All print screened from the DVD's of the films *Heaven's Gate* and *The Deer Hunter*  
Done by myself over the course of May until September, 2011

