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Kill Bill O Ren Ishii Fight Scene Critique 1 & 2

The *O Ren Ishii Fight* scene from the movie *Kill Bill* is a commentary on the acquisition of traditional Asian martial arts into the western world by perceived force and the interplay between the two ideologies existing simultaneously. Traditional and contemporary approaches meeting in a clash of wills.

The scene opens onto a yellow-clad caucasian woman physically opening a set of Japanese sliding doors; intentionally unveiling a zen garden, complete with symbolic representations of the four elements. As the eyes adjust to the night sky, the snow-covered scene of tranquility and innocence spills before us. We glimpse a solid earthen wall surrounding the compound; a metaphor for the separation of the contemporary world and the traditional world that still exists today. The stark yellow of the jumpsuit worn by the women stands out, declaring that she is not meant for this place, this tradition, and this culture. This is the first of many representations utilized in the film to showcase the disparities between the two approaches to martial arts and the perceived attitude that one approach is the only legitimate practice.

As the yellow-clad woman enters the space, we spy an Asian woman dressed in white, waiting on the other end of the field. Already we are pitting the two cultures against each other in wardrobe, color, and approach. A slow businesslike approaching warrior dressed in a yellow jumpsuit is befitting of the contemporary role, while the stable and confident white warrior is situated within the traditional depiction. It is clear to the viewer that the yellow-clad warrior is covered in blood and has her weapon at the ready; painted in the metamorphic bloody brutality and violence inherent in her western culture from the beginning. Her approach is watched methodically by the white warrior, until the white warrior addresses her in English, questioning the quality of her blade.

Here we see the first verbalized response to eastern martial arts philosophies existing in western culture, and the non-verbal counter-response and undermining of this perspective. The white Asian warrior questions the authenticity of such a traditional blade belonging to the western women, and at the same time undermines her own authenticity by engaging in a trope of the wise masterful Asian martial artist. I mean really, how could anyone know the quality of the blade across a field, and in the martial arts does it really matter? The fact that a warrior with an unsheathed weapon is approaching should precede the authenticity of the blade. The practice of the martial arts as a

defensive art is lost in this exchange and heightened by the troupes that each warrior plays.

To further drive home the trope of assuming that the western world is unready and unappreciative of the eastern arts, the white warrior proceeds to question the yellow warrior in Japanese, assuming the yellow warrior will not understand and be able to authentically respond to her questions. The tactic fails because our yellow warrior is unfazed and able to respond in Japanese as well. Just then the water splashes and makes an intrusive sound in the otherwise quiet landscape; reminding us that the outside world and other perspectives exist.

As the conversation and posturing escalate in intention, the white warrior removes her shoes and bows; demonstrating her ability to connect to the earth and be grounded in the traditions of the martial arts. This bow, although presented as respectful, is just another way the white warrior mocks her opponent and reminds her that she can not be as close to the traditions as the white warrior is.

As the white warrior begins to enter the battleground, the upbeat and energetic Hispanic soundtrack explodes across the scene. These sounds further push home the idea of a duel; good versus evil with only one outcome, harkening back to the western duel where good always prevailed. As the camera cuts back and forth from the deadly dance-like moves and the intense staredowns, we are reminded that a physical and mental battle of wills is being waged, out on the snowy battlefield. A battle that punctures the age-old debate, over which philosophy is better, western or eastern? A trumpet roars to life, just as the two warriors hit a stalemate, forcing one to triumph and deliver the killing strike. It is no surprise at this point that the white warrior does just that and finishes with the phrase, "silly Caucasian girl likes to play with Samurai swords", again undermining the yellow warriors' authenticity, understanding, and ability as a true warrior.

"You may not be able to fight like a Samurai, but you can at least die like a Samurai", words used to rub salt in the wound; to wound not just physically with the killing blow, but also emotionally and culturally. The hesitation and animosity shown by the white warrior allow the yellow warrior an interval to gain control. As the yellow warrior rises from the blood-stained snow, the scene is fuzzy and dreamlike in the shot. A sharpening and focus of the yellow warrior's face and sword represent the clarity and overcoming of physical, mental, and cultural barriers; barriers that can never be broken in a true warrior.

The first hint of uncertainty is shown in the gaze of the white warrior, and the first glimpse for the audience to understand that maybe the white warrior is

not the just, innocent savior. Verbal acceptance is given by the white warrior, when she apologizes for her insolence earlier, further demonstrating her character change from good to bad. A new level of truthful respect is exchanged between the two warriors; equal in physical ability for the first time.

A secondary exchange of twirls, slices, and blocks are emitted; both warriors limping and breathing heavily. The water drips into the silence again, foretelling the spilling of blood. A stark rivulet of blood caresses the white warrior's foot, proclaiming the loss of tradition and a giving of ground.

As the yellow warrior quickly delivers a killing attack, beheading, it signifies the loss of traditional knowledge and the acquisition and acceptance of a new tradition. Violence will always be the winner regardless of authenticity, lineage, or ethnicity. A message of both contemporary and traditional ideologies that engage in tension while attempting to coexist.