

Grit and grace

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True Grit has

a lot of competition in the upcoming Oscar award night, February 27. It's [not expected to win big](#), although it's been nominated for ten awards. Before the attention fades, however, I want to cast one more vote for the western remade last year by the Coen brothers.

My vote is based on the

success *True Grit* has had in making

me uneasy--uneasy about the way we've mythologized violence in the western, and uneasy about the film's parallel to the moral landscape of contemporary America, where violence and gun rhetoric remind me of the bluster of Rooster Cogburn (Jeff Bridges) and the doomed belief in Old Testament blood justice displayed

by 14-year-old Mattie ([Hailee Steinfeld](#)). As she witnesses the horror of men hanged, shot and dragged by horses, Mattie loses the innocence of her religious bravado. "I was in the middle of it," she says. "It was a terrible thing to see."

Armond White, reviewer

at *New York Press*, [says](#) the

Coen brothers are making a statement about violence (even as they're preoccupied with it) and makes a good case for his view. While it's still a western, White argues, the landscape is stark and forboding. And the literary language (honoring the book by Charles Portis), which adds interest and humor, also serves to make the violence more jarring by contrast.

Finally, there's that

music. The soundtrack begins with "Leaning on the Everlasting Arms" plunked out on a piano, then swells to the same hymn and others done with string accompaniment. Meanwhile, the violence rolls on.

Is there a moment of grace in the film? That's arguable, but there is one moment that stands out. Usually the hero kills the "bad guy" and gallops off into the sunset. In this film, U.S Marshall Cogburn must go back, retracing his steps in an attempt to save Mattie's life. Night falls, the horse stumbles with weariness and Cogburn stumbles on with Mattie in his arms...

Soon afterward, the credits come up and Iris DeMent sings one more [plaintive version](#) of "Leaning." At that point, most of the audience is yearning for a sign of God's grace.