

Amy Kane in Hadleyville

Consider a critical scene in *High Noon*. In the movie, Grace Kelly plays Amy Kane, the wife of Marshal Will Kane (Gary Cooper). As a Quaker, Amy is opposed to violence of any kind. Indeed, she tells Kane that she will marry him only if he vows to resign as marshal of Hadleyville and put down his guns forever. He agrees. But shortly after the wedding Kane learns that four villains have plans to terrorize the town, and he comes to think it is he who must try to stop them. He picks up his guns in preparation to meet the villains, and in so doing breaks his vow to Amy. Unrelenting in her passivism, Amy decides to leave Will. She boards the noon train out of town. But then she hears gunfire, and, just as the train is about to depart, she gets off and rushes back to town. Meanwhile, Kane is battling the villains. He manages to kill two of them, but the remaining two have him cornered. Then one of them falls.

Amy has picked up a gun and shot him in the back.

We briefly glimpse Amy's face immediately after she has pulled the trigger. She is distraught, stricken. When the camera angle changes to a view from behind, we see her head slowly drop under the weight of what she's done.

What is going on with Amy at that moment? It's possible, I suppose, that she believes she shouldn't have pulled the trigger, that she let her emotions run away with her, that her act has resulted from weakness of will. But I doubt that's it. More likely is that when Amy heard the gunshots she decided—agonizingly—that the right thing for her to do was return to town and help her husband in his desperate fight. But why then is Amy dismayed? If she performed the action she thought was right, shouldn't she feel only satisfaction about what she has done?