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### The King of Rock & Roll

The late rock and roll legend Elvis Presley can be described as one of the most famous and distinctive figures in American music history. The biopic *Elvis* depicts Presley as a rebellious rocker that took the world by storm and fought prejudice and conservative thinking to become an icon in American music and culture. Through use of extravagant imagery and a dynamic soundtrack, *Elvis* tells the story of a boy from Memphis whose instant rise to fame skyrocketed him to a pop legend, yet not without tribulation. The humanities and Elvis go hand and hand because he influenced not only music during his iconic career but American culture to this day, solidifying his contributions to the music industry and beyond.

*Elvis* focuses largely around the 1950s and 60s, when Elvis was the greatest star in America, making music and movies non-stop on his way to solidifying his status as an American icon from Memphis, Tennessee (*Elvis* 00:15:00 – 00:25:00). The film also touches on Elvis's youth, growing up in Memphis and being heavily influenced by gospel music and of course, rhythm and blues. Both genres of music were strongly tied to black communities and Elvis spent much of his youth living in the suburbs of a predominately black town. The movie this as having a huge impact on the type of music Elvis loved and brought to a bigger stage, which also caused a lot of his controversy in Elvis's career since segregation and discrimination against African Americans was prominent at the time. *Elvis* chronicles many of the biggest and most poignant moments in his elaborate career as an entertainer, ending with his longstanding Vegas residency and his eventual death from pure exhaustion and years of pill abuse.

What the movie really brings home is how influential his manager, Colonel Tom Parker, was in his life and how he used Elvis' success to feed his gambling addiction and stole hundreds of thousands of dollars from him, while convincing him to play concert after concert and never leave the country to tour. The movie brings to light how not only Colonel Parker, but others in Elvis' inner circle took advantage of Elvis' talents, and his fast-paced, glamorous lifestyle came at a cost.

Imagery in a film is often used to portray a certain mood, which includes not only the visuals but the music and tone in how the film is presented. *Elvis* does an incredible job of this by capturing some of Elvis's most iconic moments with quick scene changes and a strong focus on Elvis's emotion's during the scenes. There are several close-up shots of Elvis's face, and his vehemence is seen throughout the film with slow motion scenes, a key element of how the film is shot. The actor who played Elvis Presley in the biopic, Austin Butler, emulated Elvis's undeniable moves and body language to the point where you couldn't tell between the two. The costuming created another important part of the imagery that made it seem like real life and honestly reproduced the characteristic style of mid-20<sup>th</sup> century America. Elvis was widely known to wear flashy clothing that to conservative America seemed flamboyant and showy. The movie captures that mood extremely accurately by resurrecting Elvis' unique attire such as his vibrantly colored shirts and full leather outfits.

The soundtrack is perhaps one of the best things about the film. It condenses some of Elvis's most well-known songs and live performances to recount how dynamic of a singer he was. Remixes of Elvis's songs appeared throughout the scenes as well as original recordings by the king himself. The mixture of old and new brings a different take on the life of Elvis. His unmistakable voice is heard throughout the film, which includes both the voice of Austin Butler

and Elvis's own powerhouse voice ringing in the background all through the movie's running time. The fervor his music brought to the story of his life in fact told the tragic story of Elvis Presley.

The biopic does justice to Elvis's incredible yet anguished life and career. Through modern cinematographic imagery and the tracks that made Elvis a phenomenon brought earnest emotion to the film and as an audience member the story was captivating the entirety of the movie. Costume design captured the style of the rock and roll era and the slow-motion scenes combined with the fast-paced performances made the visual show dynamic and exciting. The film embodies the spirited and potent music that could only be from Elvis himself. *Elvis* is a reminder of the talent and persistence that makes legends and Elvis Presley's role in music is one that will live on.

Works Cited

Diaz, Joanne. Gardner, E. Janet. *Reading and Writing about Literature*. Bedford/St. Martin's, 2021.

*Elvis*. Directed by Baz Luhrmann. Performances by Austin Butler, Tom Hanks, and Olivia DeJonge. Warner Bros. Pictures, 2022