

Cultural differences: witness – peter weir: into the world



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

The film *Witness*, directed by Peter Weir portrays the concept of cultural differences between the Amish and the outside world through various film techniques. Weir demonstrates aspects of moving into the world using symbols, characterisation, setting and diegetic and non-diegetic sounds so to convey the significant cultural differences within the film. The contrast of the Amish and the outside world is expressed in the barn scene. The scene opens with the car, which is a symbol and motif of the outside world. The car is placed in the barn which further demonstrates the contrast of both cultures.

It is clear that the car doesn't belong with the barn, as in Amish culture technology isn't used, especially cars. As John Book fixes the car it expresses his yearning to leave and escape the Amish culture, as he belongs with 'the English', his world. John fixes the car, repairing the radio which shows that he is a step closer to the outside world. Diegetic music from the radio convey cultural differences as the chorus of the song repeats 'don't know much about history' this alludes to the idea that the protagonist Rachel and John have a lack of understanding towards each other's cultures, as they are from separate worlds. Cultural differences are conveyed as the camera angle is a wide shot exposing the setting, as both characters dance, Rachel awkwardly moves and asks 'what are you doing?' this communicates that she is unfamiliar with music and dancing, the juxtaposition of the song lyrics and her awkward dancing further display her little knowledge towards John's actions. Cultural differences are represented through the actions of Rachel and John, as close up shots display their facial expressions.

Their facial expressions are happy however they often pause to look at each other without smiling, which illustrates that they are aware of what they're doing, is wrong. As there is chemistry between the characters, their pauses show the tension of the situation. It is clear that there is chemistry however they cannot pursue their relationship as they are from different worlds. This is further implied through John singing the lyrics 'that I love you and I know that if you love me too what a wonderful world this would be' This indicates the possibility of how things would be if their cultures were more accepting. The contrasts of both cultures are expressed through the mid shot of both characters as they are caught by Ellie.

The car lights shine on Rachel and John, which emphasise that they have been caught in the act and that their actions are 'immoral', as the Amish are not to use technology, let alone listen to English music this is further supported by the close up shot of Ellie's surprised and disappointed expression. Towards the end of the film, there is a scene which highlights cultural differences. In this scene Rachel and John are saying goodbye as John goes back to the outside world. In this scene, it is demonstrated through the close up shots of both characters gradual smiles and combination of hopeful non-diegetic music, that they have realised and accepted that John doesn't belong in Rachel's Amish community and must go back to his world. The cultural differences are made prominent through setting and costuming. The juxtaposition of John's suit, the land and the bird house emphasises the differences in culture as a suit is typically worn everyday in the modern world for work, however he wears the suit on the natural landscape which signifies his lack of connection to the Amish world.

The acceptance of John's departure back to the English world is made apparent through the framing of both characters. Cultural differences are shown in this scene as the mid shot of Rachel exhibits her framed by the house door showing where she belongs. This is contrasted by the mid shot John as he framed by the road; this demonstrates his world and that he must leave to be a part of the outside world. This is followed by John following the path to his car to drive off; the car represents his world which further represents his return to his own culture. It is clear throughout the film Witness that Peter Weir has effectively utilized film devices to communicate the cultural differences between the outside world and the Amish.