

The film "touch of evil" essay

[Entertainment](#), [Movie](#)



The film " Touch of Evil", mostly recognized as a meaningless gangster film, but truly one of the masterpieces of the noir genre, depicts with unnerving mastery a number of difficult social themes. For this paper, I have chosen to analyze the transformative identities of Quinlan and Vargas, who are both antagonists and mirrors of each other in this movie.

Quinlan and Vargas are both cops, they both pursue justice - however, they have a slightly different definition of it. They represent two sides of the dilemma of who is in his power to do something to right a wrong: the cop or the law? Is it better to let the guilty go free, or risk framing a few innocents? Quinlan firmly believes that a cop can be judge, jury and executioner. Vargas is a " starry-eyed idealist", who thinks that a policeman is merely a tool of the law. The film masterfully shows the differences between them from the beginning.

Quinlan is huge and looming, heavy in every sense of the word. He is a man whose obvious bulk demonstrates what he has been through: every ounce of fat is his past, weighing down on him. He is shown as someone who is also lost: the squint of his eyes is almost as if he constantly tries to understand what precisely he is doing. He has the demonstrative sureness of a man who is only " sure" of himself for show: even if the show is for himself, he is still confused. He is a wounded mammoth: his limp - gotten heroically, taking a bullet for his friend - adds even more to his tragic feel.

Quinlan has the intuition of a wounded beast. His " hunches" are often correct, but his methods are not - and this is what kills him eventually. " A great detective, but a lousy cop" - this is how he is characterized in the end.

Vargas, on the other hand, could be poster child for the police. He is stylish as much as a police job allows style. In contrast to Quinlan, who is shown as the typical redneck, Vargas is the atypical Mexican: successful, clean, speaking English with no accent. An idealist to the core, he is extremely sensitive about his job, considering it a dirty, but necessary duty. Vargas is admirable - he is even polite about his accomplishments. He has no need for hunches, but instead relies only on evidence, and states that he only takes action if the evidence is absolutely infallible. Quinlan criticises him for it: his life has taught him that sometimes a good criminal does not leave evidence, and then it is a cop's job to reign him, despite the lack of data.

Thus, these two represent a dilemma. Nonetheless, as the film's storyline manifests, we see the difference between the two begin to blur. As if a crooked mirror of Quinlan, Vargas endangers his wife during the course of his pursuit of justice. The poster child is then shown as succumbing into the same stereotypes and prejudices that Quinlan has submitted to over the course of thirty years. When he knows who has taken her, he does not take the time to act officially, fearing for her life and sanity.

He becomes brash, decisive, and, above all, aggressive. He does not kill. Yet. There had been no need for him to. But from then on, the possibility is there. His dark side is allowed out the more the longer the film develops. This is appropriately reflected in how his character is depicted.

If at the beginning he is sure of himself, though not overconfident, in the scene near the end where he searches for Susan, he is as lost as Quinlan ever was. Even their expressions look something similar then. He is

descending, darkening, changing. He dares to do what Quinlan did not back in his day, and it was only chance that saved him from becoming more monstrous.

On the other hand, Quinlan, whose character does not evoke any sympathy at all at the beginning - a fat bully whose arrests depends upon delirious "hunches" - gains sentimental value over the course of the film. He is a very good portrayal of what may happen to any human who is put face to face with the violence inherent to the soul. His response is also violence: this is what gives him his mean look and harsh method.

"Never again" - a great number of crimes had been committed under this slogan, and Quinlan is a great depiction of how that happens. Yet, as time passes, it is shown how the very idea that gave him strength now weakens him. After twelve years, he finally resuccumbs to drinking.

His delusions destroy his strength, they make him susceptible to hypnotic influence, even so simple as that of a hotel sign, and forgetful. He seems smaller, a daze overtakes him, and by the end of the film, he is completely lost in an imaginary world. He is honest and faithful, a good worker and a good detective - and yet his presuppositions are all wrong, and this makes him the terrorist rather than the victim. Quinlan is frightening in his anger: he finally becomes a killer in truth in this film - and yet his belief that he is right, the belief of a drowning man at his last straw, makes us pity him like we would someone in a madhouse. The characters mesh as time passes, becoming more and more like their opposites.

By the end, they have almost switched places. Chance saves Vargas, chance kills Quinlan. This film creates an illusion of insanity, showing the descent into madness from two sides. Quinlan is shown as fallen, left with only vestiges of who he once was and dead in the end, and Vargas is shown as ready to fall, balancing on the edge of the same oblivion.

The situations they go through are one and the same, and one is left wondering, what it is that is the final touch to decide a human fate, for it is an uncertain thing. " Touch of Evil" is not a black-and-white film. It is grayscale in all senses of the word.

Works CitedWells, O. (Producer/Director). (1958). Touch of Evil [Motion Picture]. USA: Universal StudiosCamper, F.

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