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Nick Parks stated that his animated film “ Chicken Run” was based on the classic war film “ The Great Escape” Essay Sample

“ The Great Escape” is a war/ action film with spectacular stunts and special effects directed by John Sturges. It stars many famous actors: Steve McQueen, James Garnett and Richard Attenborough. It was made in 1963 and set in the 1940’s in a German prisoner of war camp, where 250 men need to escape from to distract the enemy from fight the war. Around 12 RAF officers set out to tunnel their way out.

“ Chicken Run” (2000) is a children’s comedy about chickens needing to escape from Mr. Tweedy’s farm or else they will be put into pies. They need to learn how to fly in order to escape the dreaded pie-making machine. Chicken Run was directed by Peter Lord and Nick Park who have also co-directed Wallace and Gromit, another children’s classic. The film stars Mel Gibson, Tony Haygarth and Miranda Richardson.

Both films are very similar on general plot, they are both about “ people” trying to escape wrongful imprisonment but keep getting caught whenever they attempt to escape.

However, the plots differ extremely when you look at them in more detail. Chicken run is about chickens trying to escape a chicken farm because they would get eaten if they didn’t. Great escape is about soldiers trying to escape from a camp because it is their duty to cause the enemy distress.

In chicken run there is never the fear of being shot if they get caught, they are always just brought back. Great escape shows the threat at which the prisoners are under every time they try to escape.

The plan in Great escape is to tunnel under the ground. This plan is carried out with help from everyone but with only a few main leaders, just like chicken run.

The two films begin on a similar scene at different times of the day. "The Great Escape" began with a strong military, now very well known, tune which carried the camera across a panning shot of the prisoner of war camp when the prisoners were being brought into it. This gives the impression of travelling, which is what the main characters were doing at the time.

This view is punctuated by some very bold and red credits. The credits begin with "Steve McQueen" which shows one of the main selling points for the film was its all star cast.

The first scene is bright and sunny, following the patrol until it comes up to prison, with its barbed wire and a sense of foreboding. The camera then gives us the view from Steve McQueen's eyes, him looking for ways of escape whilst showing the viewer all of the security of the camp. The view of the German vans was a shot from below, looking up at the van showing that it is intimidated and a main dominant through the film, the intimidating officers and weapons.

“ Chicken Run” also begins with a panning shot across the wires of the farm. However, this scene begins at night to show the secrecy of what is happening. There is a close up of the dog in the first scene, this was a direct parallel with the shot of the camp guards in Great Escape. Then there is a shot of the torch beam being dragged along the floor, a direct parallel of the searchlights in Great escape. These first few shots also show the sense of entrapment shown in Great Escape.

We then are shown an escape attempt by the main character, Ginger. Straight away we are plunged into the suspense and drama carried out through the whole film. This is because children need to have visual stimulation straight away in a film to grab their attention and make them watch it. This is also the reason why, almost straight away, we are shown comedy when chickens use the food tray to hide under and walk with it on their heads. This first escape attempt is a very small sort of tunnel underneath the wire of the farm, this resembles the big plan in the great escape, also that they got caught trying to escape. Ginger is thrown in the cooler, just like Hiltz was in Great Escape put in the cooler very early on.

Most of the characters in “ The great escape” are mirrored as chickens in “ Chicken Run”. Bartlet in Great Escape was the man in charge, he was turned into Ginger in Chicken run, the chicken who organises the plans, the one who really has to get out of the farm/ camp. Ramsay the British officer is mirrored by Fowler, a chicken who has had RAF background, albeit in the poultry division as a mascot, but he acts extremely stereotypically English. He says things like “ Chocks away”, “ Old chap” and “ Great Scott”. He also behaves

the way a stereotypical British officer would by making such comments as “ Pushy Americans, always showing up late for every war. Overpaid, oversexed, and over here”

Hilts is mirrored by Rocky, a smarmy self-confident American who plays his own part in helping with the escape plans. Also Rocky is often shown riding a bicycle whereas Steve McQueen is often shown with the motorbike he used whilst escaping the Germans.

However, in Great Escape Hilts keeps trying to escape but gets caught and put in “ the cooler” where he sits and bounces a baseball against the wall. In Chicken Run Ginger plays this parallel by getting caught and being put in a cooler and bouncing a sprout against the wall because Mr. Tweedy (who catches her) doesn't know that Rocky is in his farm so he wouldn't be able to play that parallel. Headly is paired with Nick and Fetcher, two rats who do the scrounging for the plan. They collect things like tools and materials to help the chickens escape as does Headly for the RAF men. McDonald who is the Intelligence behind the tunnel in Great Escape is mirrored by Mac (short for Mac Nugget) who is the intelligence behind all of the chicken's escape plans. He is also Scottish which is used quite a lot in the film in his costume and the fact that no one can understand him because of his accent.

There is also a chicken very early on who dies in Chicken run who is mirrored by Ives in the Great escape by the way that he dies early on and how this affects the rest of the farm/ POW making them all want to get out more and faster. Edwina is killed because she is not laying enough eggs. This is a

reference to the Conservative former Health Minister, Edwina Currie, whose political career foundered over an egg-related farming crisis.

Mr and Mrs Tweedy also have references for their characters. Mr. Tweedy is the man in charge of the chickens but he is afraid of what his wife might do to him if he does something wrong. This is the typical behaviour of the camp commandant in the Great Escape, who is afraid of the Gestapo, who is obviously mirrored by Mrs. Tweedy who wants to kill the chickens to be rid of them.

In both films the accents of the characters plays a major part in showing how different they all are. In chicken run the accents are used for comedy like no one can understand Mac because he is Scottish and no one can understand Fowler because he is over the top English. In Great Escape it is used to highlight the way in which each of the nations got together to help each other in the war and how the whole world was at war.

The contrasts in the film are also seen by what the scenes look like. Chicken run is an animated film which appeals to young children whereas Great Escape was made for older people who would understand the perils of war.

The animations in Chicken run are very bright and charming for the young child. The appearance also brings humour to the film with the strange grins and beaks which the chickens have, also the way they move a sort of waddle because their legs are so far apart. However, the four more intelligent chickens, Ginger, Rocky, Mac and Fowler are slimmer which helps you pick

them out in a crowded scene. This is so that the children can distinguish the chickens in a chaotic scene.

The characters in Great Escape use costumes to distinguish each other. The Germans all wear green uniforms whereas the senior British officers wear blue.

The costumes in Chicken Run are to make the characters more personalised. Ginger has a small neckerchief and a bobble hat. The hat is very army styled which is a parallel to Great Escape, especially as she is the first character we see whilst she is escaping and she has a dark green hat on.

Rocky has a bright American style neckerchief which reminds the viewers of the parallel between him and Hilts in Great Escape.

Mac has a tartan scarf to show that his accent is Scottish, which has the comedy element because the American can't understand a word which he says. He also has scruffy ginger feathers on her head like a stereotypical Scottish man, scraped back from his face by a headband.

Fowler has a white flying scarf which shows his British aviation past and also has his top feathers scraped back like the stereotypical English pilot.

All of the characters are very stereotypical. All of the other chickens have pearls like old wives (a link to women's institutes?).

The locations were also very similar. Not only was there a camp in both but also a cooler. Also in the camp both film characters referred to the huts with numbers. “ Coop17”, “ Hut 104”.

There were many other parallels running through Chicken run with Great Escape. For example there is role call in each where the farmer/commandant counts all of the chickens/prisoners. Also when the plan is being formulated in each the leader goes through the roles of each person/chicken.

In Great Escape the planks of wood from the bed used as slats are taken from the bed to be used in the construction of the tunnel. Then Cavendish jumps onto his bunk and falls straight through it onto the floor. This is imitated in chicken run when the same thing happens.

Chicken Run is a very funny film which achieves its humour through many different means, Visual, Verbal, Situational and Topical.

The Verbal humour comes from the quotes often with bathos. When Rocky and Ginger are in the pie machine they get trapped in the oven and Rocky says “ It’s like an oven in here” this is an example of bathos because of the tension beforehand of them being trapped in the machine. “ I don’t want to be a pie, I don’t like gravy” is another example of Bathos from Babs when Ginger has told the chickens that they are all going to be chopped up and put into pies.

There is also verbal wordplay; “ Let’s not lose out heads” is what Ginger says after she has told them that they are going to die. “ The chickens are

revolting” was said by Mr. Tweedy but Mrs. Tweedy misinterprets what he meant she thinks he means the word as in disgusting but he really means as in rebelling.

There is a lot of other wordplay and references to other quotes, Nick and Fetcher commonly use this form of humour when laughing at the chickens attempts to fly, “ Poultry in motion”, “ It’s raining hen”, “ Birds of a feather, flop together”.

Fowler’s speech is humorous because quite often people do not know what he is saying hen he says “ chocks away” no one does anything until he explains what he means.

There are often comic references made on Mel Gibson’s part in the verbal humour. As Rocky flies into the chicken coop for the first time, he screams “ Freedom!”, an allusion to Gibson’s role in Braveheart. After Rocky leaves, there is another joke at Mel Gibson’s expense. Bunty says, “ I don’t even think he was American”, a reference to the common misconception that Gibson is actually Australian. (Although he was born in the USA and didn’t move to Australia until he was 12, the belief persists, especially in the UK, that he’s Australian.)

Babs’ character is also very humorous because of how random and stupid she is. When Edwina is taken away, Babs’ asks “ Is Edwina going on holiday?” and when Ginger comes out of the cooler Babs says “ Morning, Ginger. Back from holiday?” to which Ginger replies I wasn’t on holiday.

Babs. I was in solitary confinement.” Then Babs says “ Oh. It’s nice to get a bit of time to yourself, isn’t it?”

There is also a lot of visual humour. The chickens themselves are very comical, their huge teathy grins underneath their beaks and the strange way they use their wings as hands.

During the time when all of the chickens are trying every way in which they can to get themselves to fly, Mac is tossed into the air exactly like a caber in the Highland games.

Also the props the chickens used on set. When Ginger is trapped in the cooler she bounces a Brussels-sprout up against the wall instead of the baseball which Hilts used in the great escape.

The visual humour, however, is mainly slapstick. When Rocky and Ginger get trapped in the oven Rocky manages to fall into every pie in there on his way to the door. Mr. Tweedy gets hit in the face with a pie from Mrs. Tweedy. When Nick and Fetcher are scrounging, they have to get by Mr. Tweedy to steal his tools, so they hide under a pair of gnomes which look like they are walking on their own which confuses Mr. Tweedy. Also, at the very end, when the chickens have escaped they find their way to a bird sanctuary to live, where they change the sign to read “ chikin sanctuary KEEP OUT”

There is also situational humour. The whole film is so preposterous because it is about talking chickens, which makes it very funny and appealing to young children. There are some extremely funny scenes if you just randomly

say the plot to them for example, two chickens trying to escape from a chicken pie machine, or chickens fighting, chickens using human tools to build, a chicken riding a bike, two chickens having a romantic interlude and 6 chickens overpowering a fully grown farmer, tying him up and hiding him under a chicken coop.

Also the film plays on how gullible the viewer is. Throughout the whole film we believe that Fowler was in the RAF and that he used to fly aeroplanes until, at the very end, he says “ Good heavens, they don’t let chickens fly complex aircrafts in the RAF” and they we realises how stupid we were to actually believe this.

The humour throughout chicken run was there to highlight the sad, when we see the juxtaposition of the happy against the sad we realise that chickens are killed to make pies and it is a very sad time for these chickens in this farm. Also the humour releases the tension, especially for the young audiences they cannot watch extremely serious films and enjoy them; they need a little humour to lighten the mood every now and again. The humour also hides the reality and violence of real chicken farms mainly for the children’s benefit.

There is also humour used in “ Great Escape” although not as much as the script did not need to hide the violence and reality of war but needed to enhance it.

The humour in Great Escape was mainly visual and verbal as their situation and topic were very serious, them being prisoners in the enemy camp. The

humour was there to juxtapose the happy and sad to really enhance the sadness of such things as when Ives got shot or when Ives and Hilts were put into the cooler.

There was visual humour, for example when Hilts and friends are brewing their own alcohol and each of them tries a bit but it takes their breath away.

There is also verbal humour, when Hilts decides to celebrate the 4th July he says "Down with the British" to which the British officer replies "Down the British".

Each of the films has very similar structures. The exposition in each is about introducing the camp and the sense of entrapment and also the need to escape. The development in both is a plan to escape. In Great Escape the plan is to tunnel and all of them will help carry this plan out fairly equally. In Chicken run the plan is to fly over the fence and this can only be achieved with the help of Rock, who can "fly". Also, in Chicken run there is a threat introduced in the development. The pie machine is introduced and it becomes compulsory that they leave, otherwise they will be killed.

The complication in Great Escape is then that one of their tunnels is found and many other problems with forging, dispersal and Danny trying to escape. Also in the complication it is found that the tunnel is 2ft short which results in the men being found escaping so not many men actually escape.

In Chicken run the complication is that Rocky can't actually fly which causes the whole plan of escape to be entirely futile. Rocky then runs away leaving the chickens with no escape plan and Mrs. Tweedy builds the pie machine.

The two films then completely differ in the climax. In Great escape the climax is the men scattering themselves around Germany, each trying to get home. Each has a different escape technique and the viewer is not sure which may escape because each plan seems to be failing.

In chicken run the climax is the escape. The chickens decide to build a flying machine to help them escape. They attack Mr. Tweedy and Rocky comes back to help them escape. They fly over the farm with Mrs. Tweedy the "Clingon" dragging behind but then falling from them leaving the chickens home free.

The resolution in Great Escape is the numbers of the dead, captured and escaped. They find out that only a few escape, some got recaptured but 50 were shot dead.

Chicken Run ends on a completely different note. All of the chickens escaped and found paradise, a bird sanctuary. Rocky and Ginger get together and even the rats found a place to live.

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