

Let him have it essay
essay sample



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

The ' Craig-Bentley' case was a major landmark in British legal and social history. Peter Medak released the film ' Let Him Have It' in 1999, just before Bentley was eventually pardoned. His aim was to gain the viewer's sympathy for Bentley, and we can see how he does this throughout the film. As well as being part of the campaign to get Bentley pardoned it may have been part of the campaign to stop capital punishment too. This campaign ended in 1969 when capital punishment was abolished. Many film directors, along with Peter Medak, use bias to show their side of an argument or situation and portray this through their film.

Bias is an inclination or prejudice for or against one thing or person. ' Let Him Have It' is based around the actions of two young men, Derek Bentley and Christopher Craig who, when in the process of burgling a warehouse, are surrounded by the police. Craig aims a gun towards a particular policeman, P. C Miles, and when Bentley shouts " Let him have it" Craig instantly assumes he is being told to fire. And he does. Bentley was hanged for murder but Craig escaped with only a prison sentence due to the fact that he was only sixteen, not qualifying for capital punishment.

Personally, I disagree with the hanging of Bentley as I believe there is not enough evidence to back the situation up and it seems he simply took the burden for a crime he did not commit. However, I have only seen the situation through the sympathetic eyes of Peter Medak and his film so I can not say I would not think otherwise if I saw the events from a different angle. Peter Medak uses many methods to gain our sympathy throughout his portrayal of Bentley's childhood and youth. The credits roll to an incredibly

emotive piece of non diegetic music. It appears to be in a very minor key and there is an obvious discordant riff.

This is used as an augury to tell the audience something bad is occurring. The sound of bombs dropping is portrayed by falling notes on the piano, instantly telling the audience that a war is taking place. The dynamics begin to build up momentum; the music gets rather forte (loud) and the tempo gradually increases. This creates an ominous and depressing atmosphere which reflects the film's sadness. Often in films the credits will roll in black text backed on to a white background and are usually against moving images. This way you often don't read the credits, you focus in on the events in the background.

However in this film the text is white and the background is a sad and solemn black colour. Again it reminds us that this is not a happy film and it too has connotations with death, darkness and melancholy. Furthermore, as there are no moving images in the background our attention is drawn only to the text. In my opinion this seems to accentuate the fact that this film is based on a true story; like a documentary it looks more formal. Next, as the credits come to a close the pitch increases dramatically, creating much more of a tense and dramatic effect.

We can hear that it is building up a lot of momentum and we are expecting something momentous to occur. It does, and we see this when the credits are ended by one loud and distinctive diegetic sound of a bomb falling and exploding. The first scene is then revealed. 'Hellish' and 'chaotic' seem to be the first words that appear in our minds as the camera tracks through an

air raid scene of WWII. The camera is set quite low down and moves quite unsteadily in a 'point of view shot' as if we are in the eyes of a young child.

This could indicate that the film is based on the life of a child. There is inferno all around, creating 'incident light', which is reflecting in the water creating what could be described as 'colourful' puddles. This is another contrast to the turmoil that surrounds. Residents and wardens scurry around, frantically but helplessly. Silhouettes of people dance across the walls and there are sodden children's toys lying in puddles on the floor. This reminds us that not only did adults suffer at the time, but children too.

We are shown this again when the camera pans over to a sobbing mother cradling a child. This woman could be Bentley's mother and the child, his younger brother which again could entice the audience into feeling sympathetic towards Bentley. The camera performs very wide shots and pans around to get in as much of the chaos and trouble as possible. The first major line of speech we hear is Bentley's sister Iris shouting his name. He is buried under the rubble of a bombed building and Bentley's father, wearing an ARP warden hat rushes over to help dig him out.

Then the camera tracks in to an extreme close up of Bentley's face. There is an even light focussed in on Bentley alone, as his face is revealed 'brick by brick'. I think this is used to reflect his good nature as it gives him an angelic appearance. The background noise is toned down apart from the voices of his family shouting his name and firing questions at him to get him to respond. We hear the voices and sound as if we were Bentley. We can see

that Bentley seems very “ spaced out” because he is acting deliriously and is unable to respond to them.

This is the first sign we get of Bentley’s disability. We also notice blood coming out of his left ear which highlights the fact that he may have some sort of brain damage. The ominous music returns and is non digetic. This war scene gains our sympathy for Bentley because we realise that he had quite a troubled childhood growing up in that time. The next scene segues in and the writing “ Seven years later” appears on the screen. In this scene, Bentley and his friends are vandalising a man’s shed. First of all, the camera tracks steadily across a wide shot of the scene.

The lighting is very dark apart from some ‘ incident light’ which is simply the moonlight. This creates the ominous atmosphere of which we were very much aware of in the previous scene. The drowning, non digetic music is heard once again. The bass line is arco which, when played with the high strings, creates an eerie feel. The music continues and there are silhouettes and shadows moving rapidly, linking with the sombre bass note of the music. We are introduced to Bentley through an establishing shot of him urinating against a tree.

However, Bentley is shown in the moonlight rather than the darkness which makes the audience sympathise with him because it seems to take him out of the darkness and wrong doing. Bentley shouts “ Get Off! ” to the boys as they shine a torch on him which makes us sympathise with Bentley because we see he gets used a bit like a toy; he is played with and often gets mocked. It also shows that he is maybe quite insecure. When the boys enter

the shed there is much diegetic sound as pots and tins clatter and smash. The lighting is still dark and there is moonlight entering through the windows.

The fact that Bentley's face is often shown in the light is repeated throughout the film and I, along with others, feel that this is used to reflect his innocence. In addition to this we see that whilst the boys vandalise the shed Bentley does not seem to join in until he is shown something by another boy. This shows how he is influenced easily and encourages us to sympathise with him. He seems to have quite a blank expression on his face throughout the scene, reminding the audience that he is quite "simple". We see this again when one boy finds a sandwich and pours a liquid on it.

Bentley tries to eat it but they take it away from him and throw it at the window. This almost resembles a mother or father taking a dangerous toy away from a child and receiving the same blank expression on the child's face as Bentley gives to his friends. This shows that Bentley is quite unknowing. Next there is a cutaway shot of the shed owner appearing through the undergrowth. The boys notice him coming and escape but Bentley does not have the sense to move. This could either be because he doesn't see that there could be any reason for him to be in trouble or he is just so scared that he can not move.

Furthermore, this foreshadows the roof scene when Craig is 'playing' with the police but Bentley remains still and makes no effort to escape. The man shines a torch light on Bentley's face and there is a close up shot of Bentley as he struggles to see in the light. As Bentley backs away from the man

there is an extreme close up of his face and we notice he is going to have a fit due to the flickering torch light. The pitch of the music increases dramatically to create an even more tense effect. However, as soon as the man realizes this, the music tails off and comforting words are spoken by him as he attempts to help Bentley.

There is an extreme close up shot of both Bentley and the man, and there is ‘reflected light’ bouncing off the surface of Bentley’s face and onto the man’s face. The man appears very sympathetic towards Bentley as he tries to comfort him. All of the events in this scene are combined to create a pathetic fallacy which makes the audience sympathise with Bentley.

Throughout the remainder of the film there are numerous events which encourage the audience to sympathise further with Bentley. In the scene of the approved school we are instantly shown an extreme close up of the side of Bentley’s face.

This time however, Bentley is much older and in his adolescent years. We are told that Bentley has a low IQ as he is visiting an approved school with his father. He seems quite defensive of himself because he really objects to being sent there. When they leave we are shown them leaving through the big gates of the school, out of the darkness and in to the light. This is quite ironic because it makes you think that Bentley is leaving and going on to better things but he is not and little does he know things are about to get worse!

There are a number of occasions when we are shown Bentley’s loving family. On the other hand, we are never shown Craig’s family which puts a big

contrast between the two characters. Secondly, at one point we are shown children playing on the street. The camera pans up towards Bentley's bedroom window; inside it is very dark and there is only the 'key light' from the sun outside that is just managing to light up Bentley. This shows how Bentley is very insecure and left out of the real world. When the boys are on the roof Bentley says "My Dad's gonna kill me".

This is a child's response and shows not only his young mental age but the fact that he is breaking a very strong relationship with his father. From the first time we see Craig we are shown the contrast between himself and Bentley. Craig shows Bentley a gun but Bentley refuses to touch it. This shows Bentley's good nature and lets us know that Bentley is not dangerous at all. As in the shed scene, Bentley does not try to escape. The lighting in this scene is very tautological. Again, as in the shed scene, Bentley's face is often in the incident light of the moon.

This seems to take him out of the bad surroundings. There are also many extreme close ups of Craig's evil-looking face which, as a contrast with Bentley's innocent features, seem to highlight Bentley's kind personality. We see this again when in the court room Bentley is wearing a pale blue coloured blazer. This colour has connotations with babies and children as it is quite a calm and innocent colour. Of course, this resembles Bentley's personality once again. In the trial we see Bentley sitting hunched and looking vulnerable but Craig is sitting upright and has a smile on his face.

Furthermore, Craig has a policeman sitting beside him but Bentley does not which shows that he is not as much of a danger. There is an over the

shoulder shot of Craig and it is established that Craig had so many guns he could not even count them. Again this shows the contrast between the boys because we know that Bentley wouldn't possess such a thing. There is a high angle shot of Bentley to make him look vulnerable and his bruises are highlighted using a side light. This makes us sympathise with Bentley because we see how much he has been through.

There is a point of view shot as the camera pans across the court room in Bentley's view. It stops on his family who all appear very distraught and upset. This encourages us to sympathise with Bentley because we can see how upset and caring his family are. By the looks on their faces we can see that they are pleading for Bentley's pardon. It then shows an extreme close up of Bentley's face, focussing on his eyes that are shaking and the sweat that is on his face. When the jury are firing questions at him it is similar to when he was buried under the rubble; he appears very "spaced out" and can hardly answer their questions.

His voice becomes very monosyllabic. All the way through this scene it is made very obvious that the court is doing all they can to get Bentley hanged even though many of them are doubting what is being said. By the time we reach the execution scene we are already feeling so sympathetic towards Bentley that Peter Medak's task is complete. Our sympathy for Bentley is absolute. The sombre music continues and we still see that Bentley does not have much idea about what he is about to be put through.

To conclude, I think that Peter Medak is very successful at gaining our sympathy for Bentley in this film. However, I think that this is enabled by the

fact that we have not been enabled to view the ' whole' story from every perspective. Some people, such as P. C Miles' family, would probably voice very different sympathies. The undeniable success of the film lies in its message that capital punishment is a dangerous tool which should be stopped. We have simply seen how an innocent person can fall victim to the verdict of a few unknown people in a court room.

Read next:

Terminator meets the Matrix