

'chicken run' by nick park essay sample



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

'Chicken Run' an animated film by Nick Park and Peter Lord is a parody of the Steve McQueen classic 'The Great Escape'. It uses chickens on a chicken farm to represent captured soldiers in a prisoner of war camp. Nick Park and Peter Lord use many different presentational devices throughout the film to convey the good and evil in both Ginger's and Mrs Tweedy's characters and their actions. Looking at these two characters solely I will investigate the following presentational devices: Costume, set, camera angle and music.

Using these presentational devices I show that Ginger, the courageous chicken conveys good and Mrs Tweedy, cold and calculated conveys evil. Film makers use varied camera angles to add diversity and to show character emotions and their interactions with other characters. Close up shots are used by film producers to zoom in on a characters face to show emotions via their facial expressions. The close ups give you an insight into what the person or chicken is thinking as well.

This is even more prominent in 'Chicken Run' than most other films because '90%' of the animation is shot from the neck up, to reduce the already mountainous amount of time it took to film it. An example of an effective close up shot is at the beginning of the film when the chickens are trying numerous methods to escape their captivity, the farm and Mrs Tweedy. Ginger becomes exasperated at the other chickens and their lack of knowledge/common sense and she has an extremely pained and desperate look on her face due to the other chickens stupidity.

This close up not only sets the theme but it also brings to the forefront of our minds Ginger's superior intelligence over the other chickens. During an

escape attempt Ginger is caught by two snarling, drooling and deadly looking guard-dogs, this close up is effective as it shows just how hard is for one person to escape the farm undetected let alone break twenty or more chickens out as well. The reason why Ginger is increasingly more anxious to escape is because of her opposite number Mrs Tweedy who becomes ' Tired of making minuscule profits' and invests in a pie machine.

The other chickens to seem to realise the exact predicament they are going to be in. As the pie machine is being setup a close up is used to get an insight into how cold and calculated Mrs Tweedy is. This is shown when she stares into the whirling blade of the circular saw and her menacing face reflected in the blade is the only thing on the screen. Her eyebrows and facial expression show us how she is only thinking of how much money she will be earning and how she will benefit, there isn't a thought to the chickens and their well being, just herself.

A very similar close up happens with Ginger, except she is gazing into the last gear that will complete the ' crate' but instead of seeing herself like Mrs Tweedy did she sees the other chickens, her friends. I think Peter Lord and Nick Park used this to show Mrs Tweedy is selfish and cares about what will be a self gain whereas Ginger constantly thinks of others and tries so hard to help. This is confirmed in another close up when Ginger cries emotionally as Edwina is taken away to the slaughter.

Mid angle shots show characters from the waist and can involve more than one chicken or person, it is also dubbed as the sociable shot as it is used to show character interactions. A great mid angle shot used occurs during the

meeting called by Ginger in 'hut 17' it shows the chickens discussing their latest escape plan, the shot shows how together and united their ambitions at obtaining freedom really are. Another mid angle involving the chickens shows a similar thing, all the chickens are exercising in the yard outside of their huts under Rocky's instruction.

They do all the moves in unison and it shows their determination again to achieve their common goal. A great mid angle shot is taking in the large barn involving Mr and Mrs Tweedy, Mr Tweedy is bent over and as Mrs Tweedy comes past she kicks him over, this shows the lack of respect she has even for her own husband and again brings to light her evil and callous ways. High angle shots are used to look down on something or someone; it makes the person or thing below the camera look small and vulnerable.

It is used by Nick Park and Peter Lord to show Mrs Tweedy's superiority over the vulnerable chickens. For example during the roll call (another aspect of the parody of prisoner of war camp films 'Chicken Run' is based on) Mrs Tweedy looks along her list of the animals who haven't laid any eggs, when she finds one the camera raises and looks down at the chicken it is as if we are the eyes of Mrs Tweedy: the chicken looks extremely vulnerable and helpless.

Another good high angle shot is when Mr Tweedy repeatedly throws Ginger into the coal bunker and we see him looking down at her, she is helpless and he is in control, another great shot showing how a high angled camera emphasises vulnerability. A low angle camera shot looks up at something and if the object or person is tall or large then they look powerful and

superior. An example of this is when they are lined up for the roll call and you see a whole chicken and just Mrs Tweedy's wellington boots (the Wellingtons are a parody of the black boots used by the Germans during the war).

The chickens are small in comparison to the wellington boots and this makes Mrs Tweedy look huge and powerful. Another example of Mrs Tweedy looking menacing and powerful from a low angle is when Mrs Tweedy opens the doors of the van, Ginger is looking up at her from below and this adds effect because Ginger is trapped at the same time. Insert shots are used to magnify letters or business cards, there are a few instances of this during the film. An Insert shot is used to magnify the pamphlet entitled 'Tired of Making Minuscule Profits' which gives Mrs Tweedy the idea to be a pie farm instead of an egg farm.

The shot is also used when Ginger is looking at the poster of Rocky and sees him flying this gives her the idea to try and fly over the boundary fence to escape. Along with varied camera angles a lot of other presentational devices are found in the film. They add to show the growing ever present good and evil characteristics shown in Ginger and Mrs Tweedy, respectively. I am going to look at the following presentational devices and see how they are effective within the film: setting, music and costume.

The setting for the film is 'Tweedy's Farm' a small chicken farm in the countryside, (occupied and run by Mr and Mrs Tweedy at the start of the film) which is looked down upon from a high angle, showing the layout of the farm. The chicken huts are aligned like the huts of the prisoners captured

and housed in a prisoner of war camp during the war; this immediately sets the scene of a light-hearted parody for the audience. From this high angle shot we see that farm also has a high barbed wire perimeter fence with razor wire along the top edge.

All this adds to the parody between 'Chicken Run' and 'The Great Escape' as the latter also had perimeter fences and it was hard to escape from. This set the perfect scene to the audience as it showed that it was a farm and also that the chickens were in captivity, which is a very basic overview of the plot and it's great that the audience can grasp this after a few seconds. It shows how determined and fixed Mrs Tweedy is on making money out of the chickens because with the huge fences and guard dogs there is very little chance of the chickens escaping.

On the other side of the fence is a huge barn which as the story progresses, contains the 'pie machine', the pie machine is huge with hundreds of cogs, leavers, conveyer belts and other sorts of rollers. The huge metal structure looks very large and powerful and this is effective because when Ginger is taken as the first to be turned into a pie, its huge compared to the size of Ginger and it looks like Mrs Tweedy has bought a colossal death trap for them all.

There are also instruments in it that symbolise death-like saws and blades that add to the effect. It shows how cold and calculated Mrs Tweedy is as well because she has begun to try to feed them up because the fatter the chickens were the more money she would make from it. Ginger intelligently

quickly recognises this and immediately warns her companions about it. This shows that again she is thinking about the welfare of the other chickens.

The inside of Mrs Tweedy's house pretty much matches her character, it's dull and dreary and doesn't have any posters or colour to make the room look bright and cheerful. On the table is the skeletal shape of what is assumed to be 'Edwina', this shows us that she doesn't care for the old animals but when they are not able to lay anymore eggs she would rather kill and eat them to save money on food and chicken feed.

On the same table Mrs Tweedy is banging the desk and muttering about poor profits while she is counting up the money, this layout and the way she behaves during the scene make her look cold and very selfish and that she only cares about being 'rich'. At the end the set is very different to the start, Ginger, Rocky and the rest of the chickens live in the country-side, in a nature reserve where it's calm and peaceful and Ginger achieves her dream of feeling grass beneath her feet.

It contrasts greatly from Mrs Tweedy's dank, dark house and It shows the audience that Ginger is good and that because of her determination and selfless thoughts she managed to escape from Mrs Tweedy. Music is used with good effect in the film, the first bit used to good effect is at the start when we see Ginger trying lots of escape routes and always getting caught, the same tune gets repeated over and it ends on the same not each time Ginger is thrown into the coal bunker as a punishment for trying to escape.

This repetition enhances our perception of Gingers determination as she doesn't give up and the song repeats, it helps to show how much it matters

to her that all the chickens escape from the farm. Another example of how music is used to great effect is when Edwina is taken to be killed by Mrs Tweedy and the slow sad music plays, from the slow low pitched instrument playing we know what Mrs Tweedy is going to do and when the audience catches on it shocks them because it shows that she is prepared to kill the chickens.

The best piece of music played is when all the chickens start working together to build the 'crate' and they help each other working in a construction line style, a thin piece of music is played and as the 'crate' nears completion the sound gets louder and thicker as more instruments are added until they climax at a loud point when Ginger puts the final gear onto the contraption. This music is extremely effective as it aids the portrayal of them working as a united force a team coming together working harder and harder to achieve their common goal of escaping the farm.

Similarly costume plays a big part in how characters are portrayed; it helps to display visually their thoughts, feelings, emotions or their culture. Mrs Tweedy is a character that's costume matches her personality. When the chickens are having their roll call and Mrs Tweedy is marching up and down in her boots that soldiers wore she looks like a German soldier during the war and as we can only see her huge boots which are equal to the size of the chicken she looks frightening, because she is tall it makes us feel for the chickens even more as it looks like they are defenceless against her.

The audience grasp from this the parallel again between the chicken farm and a POW camp and again the parallel between Mrs Tweedy and an evil

German commander. We generally see Mrs Tweedy wearing a red dress, with a simple pattern embroidered into it, she has her hair pulled back into a bun and she looks like a Victorian school mistress, because of this she looks like a figure of high authority and shows that she controls the goings on in the farm.

She in effect ruins the dress as on any other woman without such a masculine appearance it could appear dainty and quaint but due to her rigid posture and sharp face it looks frightening. She has a similar effect when she opens the door wearing a pink flannel knit night-gown on, someone with out such an aggressive appearance they would have appeared timid and nice but Mrs Tweedy somehow manages to make that look menacing and overpowering. This effect is achieved by sharp lines in her face and a masculine chin and nose; she has huge slanted eyebrows fixed in a permanent frown.

The audience get the impression from this that she is moody and bitter about something, which we learn to know is lack of money. Ginger however wears bright clothes these include a small green hat and a red scarf draped around her neck. I think this costume makes her seem innocent and reasonably calm. The costume suits her nature down to the ground she looks prepared and always ready which she is for the multiple escape attempts she tries.

From watching the film I have discovered that a director/producers work doesn't just focus on the action or characters but other elements of film language need to be addressed. The elements of film language like music,

costume and set were used really well in 'Chicken Run', the parody between itself and 'The Great Escape' was extremely effective and also gave them chance to add humour to the plot. A slight moral was embedded within the parody, based around the old 'if at first you don't succeed, try, try again' saying and the directors used the elements of film to display this wonderfully.

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