

# Review of the film witness



A young Amish boy called Samuel is witness to a brutal murder in a toilet at a train station. After a line up where Samuel does not identify the killer, he identifies a picture of an ex policeman, Mc Fee in a display cabinet at the police station. A policeman called John Book links him to the taking of barrels of the drug speed that had gone missing from police possession.

John has to live with the Amish to escape Mc Fee. While he is living there he becomes increasingly fond of Rachel the mother of Samuel, but other Amish do not approve of the things he does while he is staying there. The way he handles problems by resorting to violence and the dancing with Rachel to the music from his broken down car. The Amish farm is then raided where John is staying, the raid carried out by Schaeffer and his men was to find Samuel as he is the only witness to the murder. Shortly after the raid John and the Amish decides he should return home and leave Rachel behind because they agreed that he and Rachel could never become a couple because they are very different people wanting to lead two incompatible lives. Witness" is set in two main places, the busy, modern and violent city of Philadelphia and the calm, traditional and old fashioned countryside of Pennsylvania.

They are geographically close together, but in other ways they are worlds apart. In the Amish settlement of the Pennsylvania countryside, the Amish are one big community that binds together to help each other, the people are hardworking, efficient and manually skilled. The Amish lead strictly non-violent lives and will not resort to violence under any circumstances. We the viewer can see this when the Amish are stopped in their carriages by teenage tourists, who spread ice-cream over some of the Amish faces, none of the Amish would retaliate but John fought back with violence, this

demonstrates that the Amish will never resort to violence but John will always resort to violence to solve a problem. The Amish are also devoted to their religion, which involves not using any modern technology and wearing simple hand made clothes which do not include buttons only hooks and eyes, John makes fun of this by asking Rachel whether they are allowed “ zippers”. The city of Philadelphia is a modern city; there are murders, drug dealers and other types of crime being committed all over the city.

The streets are full of busy, litter throwing and hot-tempered people and angry impatient motorists during the day and at night the streets are full of violent drunks. The film highlights the differences in several different ways, the main way is when Samuel comes from Pennsylvania to the city Philadelphia to visit his mother's sister. At the train station in Philadelphia Samuel is amazed with the modern train station and when he enters the toilet he finds himself witness to a brutal murder. When you watch the film the first impressions of John Book is that he is a hard city policeman who will not give in to anyone and his prime objective is to catch the criminal.

It is clear to see in the film that John does not respect the witnesses he deals with. We the viewers of the film can see this when John is holding Samuel the only eyewitness of the murder against his will, when Samuel is scared away from home, in contrasting surroundings to which he has ever experienced and had just witnessed a man being ferociously murdered. John did not respect the way the Amish lived or have any respect for their beliefs. John was only interested in Samuel as a witness to the murder. While John was holding Samuel witness to the murder he did very little to try and explain what was happening to him and his mother Rachel in order to make the

process of finding the killer as painless as possible. Neither did John attempt to form any understanding of the situation which Samuel and his mother found themselves in.

John's attitude to the Amish and their beliefs changes as the film progresses, at first John does not understand the Amish way of life and holds no respect for their culture, but as time goes on during his stay with the Amish, he learns about their way of life, begins to respect how they live and tries to fit in as best he could for the time he spends there. In this time John does not manage to abide by the basic rules the Amish have, like not using violence and not using a radio, as when John dances to his broken down car's radio with Rachel. To keep the peace with the Amish and to stay in hiding, he has to help the Amish with their work and accept their rules. John has to do chores like milking the cows by hand and helping to build a house.

When Rachel and John first meet they are almost enemies but when John gets shot by Mc Fee Rachel feels sorry for him and looks after him in Pennsylvania till he recovers. One of the reasons why John and Rachel get on so well is because they respect each other's worlds and respects each other's views. Rachel hides John's gun for him because she knows he needs it and John tries to fit in with the Amish by helping with the Amish chores and trying to live the Amish way of life. Rachel's and John's relationship starts to develop at the point when Rachel crosses into John's world, when they start to dance to John's car radio, which the Amish do not allow. At this point we the viewer become aware of the physical attraction between Rachel and John.

Finally John has to leave the Amish when he is out of danger when Mc Fee and Schaeffer are no longer a threat. When John leaves the Amish, he is upset that he has to leave, but he, Rachel and the Amish know he and Rachel can not have a relationship because there are two different people from two totally different worlds wanting to lead different lives. After the time John spend in the country, he would have probably had developed a different outlook on life particular violence and the way he uses it to solve problems and the way the Amish solve problems by using persuasive language. When John returns to Philadelphia, he will probably think hard about why the people of the city have to be so violent and impatient.

Before John's stay with the Amish John only had one outlook on life, now he has experienced another way of life and has another outlook. If he continues his work as a detective he will probably respect the people he has to deal with, that are from other cultures and try to cater and respect their needs. Living with the Amish would have improved John's family life skills and gave him a different attitude to family life. The Amish showed him what a family really is, he sees how the Amish are one big family helping and caring for each other and living together.

At the time of the final shoot out at the end of the film, where the farm is raided by Schaeffer (the ringleader) and his men, to find Samuel the only eyewitness to the murder John proves he has changed his attitude to violence. John kill's two of the three armed intruders and is confronted by Schaeffer, Schaeffer is armed and John is not, John resort's to an impassioned argument to disarm him, he achieves this by asking him if he is going to shoot at the Amish to get to him and Samuel. Schaeffer losses his

nerve and does not go through with it and surrenders his weapons. The argument shows that John had learnt from the Amish, that problems can be solved in other ways than using violence. The writer of a film uses words to create a sense of character, mood and atmosphere. The makers of the film uses action, dialogue, camera shots and angles, sound effects and music.

“ Witness” is made up with cleverly constructed scenes, which merge together film techniques to create the designed effect. In the scene where Samuel witnesses the killing, the tension is built up by using close up camera shots, the silence of the characters, the sound effects and the build up, pounding and quickly changing music. From the time Samuel enters the toilet there is no dialogue, as Samuel walks towards the toilet cubical he passes a man (later found to be a policeman) washing in a sink, as Samuel walks past him he is greeted with a smile. Mc Fee and his side kick enters the toilet, Mc Fee stays at one end of the toilet while his sidekick walks to the other. All that could be heard was the running of the water and the policeman washing, this and the split between the two character gives the impression to the viewer that something is going to happen, giving the viewer a sense of tension.

Mc Fee makes eye contact with his sidekick and gives him a nod of the head to indicate to him to proceed with the murder. The sidekick then violently covers the policeman’s head with a blanket, the fast moving music then cuts in which builds up tension along with the fast moving characters. A knife flick is then heard and the camera zooms in on the knife which Mc Fee uses to repeatedly stab the policeman. After Mc Fee had killed the policeman, he takes his address book which contains the names of contacts

which helps Mc Fee obtain the barrels of speed from police possession.

Samuel stumbles in the toilet making a noise, the music changes as Mc Fee responds by pulling a gun from his pocket. He opens each toilet cubical in turn getting closer and closer to the one Samuel is hiding in, building up the tension the closer he gets.

Samuel tries to lock the toilet door he is in, the camera constantly moving from being on Samuel's hands struggling to lock the door to Mc Fee opening the doors getting closer to the cubical Samuel is in. Mc Fee gets to the cubical and finds it is locked, the music crescendos convincing the views that Mc Fee will find the boy, the moment before Mc Fee kicks in the door, Samuel Slides underneath the toilet cubical wall into the next toilet. Samuel stands on the toilet, Mc Fee looks underneath baffled because he does not see anyone. The music then stops and Mc Fee leaves.

In the scene where Samuel identifies the killer, the tension is built up by the noises in the police station: the constant talking, the typing, the man handcuffed rattling his handcuffs and the ringing telephones. In this scene there is no definable speech, just a clash of people talking at the same time. When Samuel is in the police station he feels frightened and out of place because everyone is bigger than him and he is not used to such a modern and busy police station. This leads to a builds up the tension, because Samuel is already frightened, by being away from his mother and in the strand surrounding of a police station.

Samuel walks over to a glass cabinet and peers into it, the music starts to play, long lasting notes. This gives the scene a mysterious feel and increases

tension. The camera focuses on a black and white photograph of Mc Fee, which it slowly zooms in on. The music turns into one long note, the camera moves onto Samuel's eyes, onto the photograph and then onto John looking at Samuel.

John proceeds to moves over to the cabinet in slow motion. This builds up the tension because the filmmaker has used the music, the slow motion and the camera, to give the audience the impression that Samuel has no doubt it was the man who committed the murder and that John also believes that Samuel had identified the correct person. John crouches down to Samuel's level and Samuel points to the photograph and looks at John, the scene then changes and the doorbell breaks the tension. Different films are separated into different categories, these categories are called genre. Some of the different genres are Westerns, Thriller, Romance, Detective, Horror, Comedy, Tragedy, Science Fiction and War Films. Different ingredients go into each genre, " Witness" has the main ingredients of a thriller, which are: Goodies and Badies, Fighting, Suspense, Danger, Evil, Race against time, Screaming, a victim and a Witness.

" Witness" belongs to the thriller genre, but it is not a conventional thriller. In some ways " Witness" is a typical thriller and in other ways it is not. Witness" falls into the thriller category best because it has the most ingredients in the thriller genre but it also has ingredients, which are found in other genres mainly Romance with a small bit of Detective and Western. The ingredients " Witness" has for a Romance is the relationship John has with Rachel, the two different people coming together and then having to part.



“ Witness” is also a detective because of the detective work that went into finding the killer and a western because of the shoot out that happened at the end of the film. Witness” is not a violent film compared to today’s standards, many of today’s films have violence throughout, but “ Witness” uses only the minimal amount of violence needed for the story line it has. The first two violent scenes in “ Witness” are the stabbings in the toilet which start the major story line and the in the town scene where John teaches the teenage tourists a lesson, this scene shows the viewer that John has not taken an attitude to violence as the Amish have and is still insisting to live the way associated with the city. The concluding violent scene which the final shoot-out takes place is essential because it brings an end to the film, where John has defeated Schaeffer, where he and Samuel are now out of danger.

In my opinion “ Witness” is a extremely good Film, the key to the Film is the way the Film maker builds up the tension in the major scenes, these scenes mark clear points in the Film. The two scenes where the boy witnesses the killing and identifies the killer makes the audience want to carry on watching to find out what is going to happen next in the film. The final major scene, the final shoot-out creates a clear conclusion and satisfies the viewers of the film. “ Witness” is made up of a range of interesting, tension building and romantic scenes. For me the best scenes are the scenes where we learn about the Amish, I find these scenes the most interesting because I get to learn about the Amish and the way they live. The scene I found the most interesting is the house building scene, seeing how they worked together to constructed a whole house without using any modern machinery.

The way "Witness" combines a thriller with romance contributes greatly to the impact of the film, because it gives the action and the excitement people want as well as fulfilling the romantic side of the audience. The role Harrison Ford plays in "Witness" is different from the role he is usually associated with, he usually plays the part of the action man and has a far more violent role than the one he has in "Witness". Harrison Ford usually uses violence throughout the film, unlike "Witness" only using violence in key parts of the film where violence is required. A good example where Harrison Ford uses violence throughout the film and plays the part of an action man is the film "Blade Runner", here he takes the role of a policeman of the future, who hunts down and terminates replicants, artificially created humans. Kelly McGinnis has not starred in as many well know films as Harrison Ford but has starred in "Top Gun". The role she plays in "Top Gun" is very different from the role she plays in "Witness".

In "Witness" she plays the caring mother living in an Amish village, where no modern machinery is used, everyone is very religious and only plain and simple clothes are worn. When in "Top Gun", she plays the part of a modern, sexy and tough businesswoman. The role Kelly McGinnis plays in "Top Gun" is the conventional female stereotype played in many modern films. Overall I thought "Witness" belonging to the thriller genre was an extremely good film. But as my favourite genre being comedy, I did not enjoy "Witness" as much as if it would have been a comedy for example Mr Bean or South Park. Even so I could recognise the cleverly constructed scenes, the authentic characters and the techniques used to build up the tension made "Witness" an above average film of the thriller genre.