

American film history analysis essay sample



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

Official hero tends to be an ideology of the law and society values, represented through characters such as police officers and lawyers, whereas outlaw hero tends to be more of an individual with own marks of traits, and own marks of actions. Ray discusses that in traditional films, how a single character can hold completely different traits , giving examples such as Terry, in the film *On the Waterfront*, who is a boxer but also a delicate person who also spends a chunk of time in taking care of pigeons as a hobby.

But Rays most vital argument is about the thematic paradigm, the avoidance of choice, or the “ denial of the necessity for choice” (Ray 63). Americans audiences have this indecisiveness of choosing what values or character traits they would like to side with. The audiences want both the extremes, such as outlaw hero and official hero, but the crucial point is that they do not wish to make a choice. Each hero has his own personalities and beliefs that the audiences can connect to, but these are multifaceted cannot be categorized into “ good” and “ bad”.

The outlaw hero surely exhibits more of a life of fantasy due to all the plentiful excitements and adventures, taking matters into his own hands of determining what’s right and wrong, but the official hero also exhibit a life of stability and comfort; a safety zone per say. The two different personalities and beliefs of the heroes re actually within us. We are a compilation of both of these values, therefore regardless of which heroes seem more remarkable, it is actually impossible to choose only one.

Through the examination of the three films, *Shadow of a Doubt* by Alfred Hitchcock, *Surface* by Howard Hawks, and *On the Waterfront* by Elia Kazan, the reason why American audiences are unable to be persuaded to side with the outlaw hero or official can be investigated through their attitudes toward women and the ultimate consequence that hits the surrounding family. There are dissimilarities between how the outlaw hero and official view women. For an official hero, it can be seen that respect and responsibility are evident in his point of view.

He is comfortable to have a stable relationship with a woman, hence “the settled life and respectability” (Ray 61). Contrastingly, the outlaw hero does not want the “settled life and confining responsibilities” (Ray 61). He wants to be free of entanglements and avoid responsibilities. If just so happens he does have a relationship, it is usually temporary and compromising. Uncle Charlie, in the film *Shadow of a Doubt*, Hitchcock introduces the official hero, detective Jack Graham to the audience. His attitude towards women is an outright characteristic of an official hero.

He has immense respect for women depicted in the relationship with Young Charlie. In the three quarters, two shot where Young Charlie and Jack are sitting on a bench, it can be seen that Jack is very respectful to Young Charlie as to giving her a suitable amount of space in between them. Even though it acts as a barrier, it is evident that he respects Young Charlie's freedom of choice, by not forcing her into any types of decision. Although Jack's original intentions are to investigate about Uncle Charlie, he stumbles upon Young Charlie, which he cannot swipe away and wants a “settled life”.

When Jack and Young Charlie are in the garage chatting, he proposes his love to her. In an over the shoulder shot from Young Charlie, the space between Jack and Young Charlie is once again separated. It is interesting that when one proposes one's love to another, that the space between each other is so parted. This can be relate to the reason that Jack, although pursuing for someone he loves, still gives space and time for Young Charlie to think? another act of respect. On the other hand, the outlaw hero can somewhat regarded to be Uncle

Charlie, as he embodies many of what the outlaw hero traits and personalities are. Although Young Charlie is clearly the outlaw hero in this movie, Uncle Charlie's attitude to women can further illustrate the avoidance of choice. What is explicitly focused here is the sexual sensation that Uncle Charlie exhale. In the medium, profile two shot of Uncle Charlie and Young Charlie in the kitchen, when Uncle Charlie holds Young Charlie's hand (in the middle of the frame), and puts the ring on. This kind of chemistry and emotional fueled tension is what a lot of people long for.

The sexual tension is depicted through Young Charlie's bright and innocent smile, caused by Uncle Charlie's charm and wit. The camera then tracks with Young Charlie as she steps back away from Uncle Charlie from a mixture of happiness and shyness, like a little girl whose crush just showed affection to her. As opposed to Jack and Young Charlie, this shot gives no space between the two characters, signifying how tight they physically are. Uncle Charlie is dominant and flirty, which are traits a lot of women love in a man. This kind of emotional fuel can also be seen in the film *On the Waterfront*.

Terry, the outlaw hero, who not only seeks for justice that the law fails to do, but also seeks for a relationship that he is interested in. Although one might think this relationship contradicts with Ray's argument of "compromising relationship" one essential key to remember and also assume is that settled relationship is often temporary, as it is unsure if Terry and Edie continue to be together and be married in the future. In the scene of the wedding dance, there is a shot where Terry and Edie is surrounded by trees or leaves, creating a closed frame around them, illustrating an isolated world that only they are in.

The audience can feel their chemistry seen from the lack of space between them; one cheek touching another, then looking into each other's eyes. The sexual attention comes when they are about to kiss. An alike sexual tension is also evident in the film, *Surface*, where Tony represents the outlaw hero. His traits are very obvious in the sense that he presents a lot of the characteristic of an outlaw hero. His disregard for settled relationship can be seen easily as he sees Poppy as an eye candy of his rather than a potential relationship.

The first meeting of Tony and Poppy exhilarates a dense amount of sexual tension. In a very carefully and strategically placed shot of Tony and Johnny, half of Tony body dominates almost the whole of the frame, while the audience can see the full body of Johnny in the background, already signifying who is the more dominant figure in this shot. More interestingly, this is where Tony is looking at Poppy while she is putting on her makeup, where her whole thigh is clearly exposed? a sign of flirtatious, sexual behavior.

This shot tells a lot about Tony, as he disregards even his boss Johnny. In a sense, Tony is already cheating with Poppy by a mutual acknowledgement of attraction, shown by Tony's unmovable stare from Poppy, and Poppy's lack of action of covering her thighs (basically allowing Tony to look). Sometimes, an official hero's attitude to women can also be seen as lack of sexual connection or lack of a sexual partner. Through the character of Inspector Guarani in *Surface*, Hawks presents these law enforcements to be very focused in public affairs and in their own responsibilities.

Inspector Guarani is only focused in the community favor of catching the criminals that he misses the opportunity to socialize with possible temporary relationships. In the scene where he takes Tony to the police station and bring him in front of the police chief, there is a three quarter shot of him, presenting how serious and devoted he is into his responsibility for the community, rather than his own individual affairs. Meanwhile, Tony is just fooling around, talking nonsense to the police and seemingly having an enjoyable time, knowing that he won't be arrested and be caught.

But sometimes, the outlaw hero does not show such sexual affection all the time. The treatment of Tony towards his sister is rather disrespectful because of his overprotective indecencies. Clearly shown in the beginning of the film, when the audience sees the first meeting of Tony and his sister, Case, Tony demands that Case should not see any other boys because he extremely protective and scared that she would be hurt by them. Although with good intentions, his actions disrespect her. In the medium, two shot of Tony and Case, Case is against the stair pole and, leaving Case no room to escape.

Tony is taller, bigger and definitely more dominant than her sister in the shot. He grabs his sister hands, which can be seen visibly reluctant of Case. This can be compared to sensual shot of Uncle Charlie and Young Charlie hands being held together to this shot of more violent behaviors. The audiences have such a difficult time to choose that result in the denial of choice. To only side with one side is something that cannot be done. The incompatible values of this dichotomy, especially towards women, make a lot of the audience unclear to make decisive decision.

The official hero presents with such upright values that they can identify and agree upon, while they also lust the colorful, emotional and sexual chemistry that outlaw hero displays. One of the major concerns that outlaw hero has is the influences that negatively affect his surrounding family. It is apparent that official hero protect his family with the law and with the community standards, but with the outlaw hero, the drive of individual actions and standards of what's right and wrong indirectly cause the family to suffer the consequences.

In the film *Shadow of a Doubt*, Uncle Charlie leaves Young Charlie miserable in a form of manner. She has to go through such a terrifying experience that Uncle Charlie put her through. Young Charlie is rooted in a troublesome situation that Uncle Charlie put her in early in the film. She finds out that her beloved uncle is actually a murderer? a strangler of rich widows. This can be fully decomposed and understood with the high angle, long shot of Young Charlie leaving the library. Her long shadow, complimented by the low key lighting of this shot, make this shot very dramatic and dark.

She is placed in a gloomy situation, which she does not know how to handle. The feel of this scene is tremendously depressing, as the audiences look downward to Young Charlie, sympathizing with her such as that her feelings got fooled and played by Uncle Charlie. Another shot that expresses this feeling is at the end where there is a two shot of Jack and Young Charlie mourning for Uncle Charlie. The camera tracks from a full body shot to a medium shot of them, symbolically tracking into both of their feelings. Jack, not knowing the truth, thinks of Uncle Charlie as a town hero, while Young Charlie suffers with the unspoken truth.

She is left with a dark secret that no one would ever dig out, which cause permanent, emotional pain and scar to the rest of her life. In a more extreme case, death is the ultimate consequence. In the film *On the Waterfront*, Terry's actions of going against the unspoken community rule of being his mouth shut, resulted in the death of his brother, Charlie. In one of the most significant scene of the film, where Terry and Charlie are in a cab together, Charlie tries to get Terry to take a high paid job from Johnny, which acts as a bribe to keep Terry's mouth shut.

There is a win and a lost in each situation. If Terry decides to take the job, the win is that Charlie survives and the lost is that Johnny does not get sentenced. But if Terry decides not to take the job, the win is hat Terry can convict Johnny, but the lost is his own brother, Charlie. Inevitable, Terry chooses the second option, which causes the death of Charlie. Right before the first shot of a single shot Terry in this cab scene, we see profile shot of Charlie and a head on shot of Terry. Charlie yells at Terry to make a decision before they get to " 437 River Street".

Here, the audiences can see the frustration on Charlie's face when he turns his face to the camera, and also the reaction shot of Terry, finally figures out what this meet is about. The pain that Charlie has been withholding finally burst out. Another shot that make us sympathize with Charlie is the shot where Charlie is hanged by a hook out on the street. The camera tracks from a full body shot to a close up shot, similar to the shot with Young Charlie and Jack in *Shadow of a Doubt*. This tracks deeper into the audiences' emotions as it registers in our brains that this is the consequence of Terry's action.

Here, the audiences can see that Charlie is dead with his eyes open, which sometimes can mean that there is something he still yet has to complete, which is to go against Johnny. The pity to Charlie can be exaggerated more when the intimate shot of Terry hugging Charlie's body to put him on the ground is shown. Comparatively, in the film *Surface*, Hawks uses Case's death to imply the consequence of Tony's actions of joining the mob and climbing to the top. Case's freedom is confined by Tony throughout the film, thus her life is already destined in the hands of Tony.

The audiences sympathize with Case because she suffers enormous pain, physically and emotionally, from Tony. First, the part her life that is controlled is her relationships. Not long after Case marries Ronald, Tony destroys their relationship by murdering Ronald. In the high angle shot where Ronald drops dead and hugged tightly by Case, the frame is actually quite tight. This depicts how close and loving they actually are. The pain she feels can also be felt by the audiences due to this sudden traumatizing. The high angle makes her look more vulnerable and emotionally fractured.

The only happiness she has is inescapable taken away from her brother. Secondly, the part of her life that is controlled is her own life. In the last scene where Tony and Case are surrounded by police outside his house, there is a two shot of Tony and Case, here Case is lying down on a couch and Tony looking down at her. This shot is similar to when Case mourns for her husband Ronald as he is killed by her brother. Case is shot in a crossfire and she finally stops fighting her life for her brother, and decides to just let it go.

All along, Tony tries to protect her sister as much as possible, and now that he sees her sister passing away right before his eyes, makes him realize what he has done to cause such harm to the only thing that mattered the most to him? his family. This consequence can be analyzed through a cost-benefit system. The audiences taste the benefits that the outlaw hero create, such as all the adventure of Tony's gang life, and the wonderful, luxurious life he gets to live, Uncle Charlie's charismatic vibrant, and luxury goods that he offers, and Terry's untouched, easy and chilled life that one would be jealous in the community.

Audiences are excited by such adventures and attractions which are usually not abided by the law? the action of individualism. But the cost of all these benefits results in undesirable endings that the audience might dislike. It is an example of a love, hate relationship, again portraying the season for the denial of necessity choice. In conclusion, the dichotomy of outlaw hero and official hero effectively explains Rays idea of the thematic paradigm.