

Film Studies Homework- Shocking Cinema

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Romper Stomper- Geoffrey Wright 1992

In Geoffrey Wright's film "Romper Stomper" there are many different elements that could be considered shocking, from the subject matter to the audience's involvement in the story and identification with characters within the movie. Romper Stomper follows the story of a Neo-Nazi group Melbourne as well as a girl Gabe and how she finds her way into the group, and the conflict between the group and a large group of Vietnamese that they oppose, with the inevitable destruction of the group of Neo-Nazi's.

Since its release the film has been very controversial and faced a lot of opposition from some groups and organisations. The main reason for this is the subject matter of Neo-Nazi's in Australia. This is a contentious issue not just because of the effects of the Second World War but also because of Australia's past history in relation to the Aborigines in Australia and the racist stigma that Australian's are often branded with. Many Australian's feared that "Romper Stomper" was going to be a catalyst for violence and racism in the youth of Australia. Though the film was praised by many Neo-Nazi groups as a great film there was no real evidence to show that the film had this effect.

Geoffrey Wright stated that "Romper Stomper" was designed to show the viewer the life of people in a Neo-Nazi group and let the viewers decide what they thought of the people within his movie for themselves. Geoffrey Wright does not use his narrative to explain or justify the actions of Hando and his gang or why they believe what they do. In a way this is shocking in its self, we are confronted with violent racism but given no explanation for it or how it came into existence, only shown it happening.

In many ways the film works mainly to make the audience dislike Hando, he is violent and brutish. These is shown by his sudden change of heart with Gabe as he throws her out of the gang for no reason and up till that point does not treat her with any respect. This makes it harder for the audience to identify with Hando, but does assist in making him a scary figure and an authoritative figure.

Hando is not merely an evil one sided being; he is shown to be more complete due to his paternal side that is shown when he is looking after a drunken Davey. Hando is shown to be very caring in his actions towards Davey who he clearly cares about a great deal. This is best shown by Hando almost tucking in a drunken Davey with a jacket. This contrast makes Hando more human and accessible which in my opinion makes him scarier as a character; it makes his racism and violent actions all the more monstrous because he is capable of love and tenderness. As we are capable of identifying with him as a human, not just a monster caricature of a Neo-Nazi.

The film challenges many of the viewer's preconceptions in a way which can be very uncomfortable. Hando is clearly shown to be very clever and also seems to value intelligence as he corrects one of his groups about the origin of the Vietnamese brothers in the bar. This idea that someone can be very intelligent and value learning, juxtaposed with unexplained violent racism confronts my

preconceptions of those who are racist as in my own mind I relate racism directly with ignorance and stupidity, and so Hando's intelligence I found particularly unsettling.

However what I personally found most shocking was the way in which I identified and even liked Davey, despite his being a Neo-Nazi and equally active in attacks on the three Vietnamese kids in the subway and many other attacks. The fact that Geoffrey Wright makes Davey so accessible and likeable I found very shocking and unsettling. Davey is shown to be loyal, trustworthy and almost childlike in his innocence about the world. His obvious attachment to Gabe and his unmovable loyalty to her is what makes him so very likeable, he comes across almost as a lovesick puppy in the way he follows her around and even defends her from both the rest of the gang when she is having a fit and Hando. Also Hando's paternal actions towards Davey and Gabe's maternal way of looking after Davey's hand does suggest a very child like quality about Davey.

I do not think that Davey is an exceptionally good or nice character in any sense, but his loyalty and few good qualities in contrast with all of the other characters in the movie who in contrast are just too racist or untrustworthy really makes Davey stand out, so it is not so much that Davey is the nicest person the viewer might meet, but rather that all the alternatives of characters to identify with are too alien and horrible in comparison. But it is still very unsettling to have any identification with any of the characters in the film because of their actions and views.

The violence within the film is obviously another very shocking element. The way in which the violence is filmed can be very ambiguous as to who the viewer is directly connected with, in many cases the camera will give the view point of a Neo-Nazi which can be very uncomfortable as there is a feeling of collaboration and involvement of the viewer in the attacks. However sometimes the viewer is also given the view point of a member of the Vietnamese gang, which can be just as unsettling especially when there is a huge change in the fight and there are so many more Vietnamese than the Neo-Nazi gang. All the violence made me uncomfortable, I did find myself hoping that Davey would not get caught and that the Neo-Nazi gang would not get caught, however I feel this is probably more due to not wanting to watch any of the violence rather than identification specifically with Hando's group, more just a fear for the new underdog.

The film has many different shocking elements, I do think this film is genuinely shocking as there are many instances where I found it very difficult to watch and was shocked not just by what I saw but my own reactions to characters and situation and the way the audience was often involved by the film. I am not sure if Geoffrey Wright set out what he aimed to achieve in giving a full and unbiased image of a Neo-Nazi group but I do think that it makes the viewer think and I did not think that the group was glamorised or made into hero figures.