

REAR WINDOW

In what ways does 'Rear Window' condemn or condone voyeurism?

Alfred Hitchcock's film, "Rear Window" reflects the societal tensions within Greenwich Village in the disconnected world of post-war America 1950. Hitchcock crafts the character of L.B. Jefferies as an allegory to the male anxieties in the repressive political climate. The national spotlight of McCarthy induced widespread fear of communist sympathisers and had a political imperative to repopulate post-war America. Women who had attained greater independence, -taking on the responsibility to keep the society running during war- were still enforced to be in a conventional utopian marriage. However, this growing independence of women stood a potential entrapment of the men's masculinity.

Initially, Stella actively criticises the notion of voyeurism that Jeff has domesticated to alleviate his ennui. At the character level, Stella is the company nurse who aids Jeff in his convalescence. Greenwich Village, a Bohemian district in a sophisticated city, reflects characters who aspire to persist the conservative 1950 values of America. Stella's character is beyond to aid Jeff's physical recovery, but indeed to disengage him from his voyeuristic behaviour and to instead follow the conventional values. Stella's practical costume speaks her sceptical and shrewd personality, and her voice of reason. Stella is introduced through her reminder to Jeff of the consequences of a 'peeping Tom', before the audience even sees her. Appeal to Jeff's worst punishment of a 'workhouse with no windows', Hitchcock alludes Jeff's voyeurism as the only escape from his sexual hindrance. Stella makes further reference that he would not find contentment from his voyeuristic behaviour from the rear window, as his 'temperature [hasn't] raised 1 degree'. Stella as a character of wisdom and reason, she questions if the burlesque dancer he's always 'watching [is] worth a red hot poker?'. She berates Jeff that the outcome of his behaviour could cause 'trouble' that she 'smell[s] in the apartment'. She shows contempt about his visual omnipotence, and admonishes the fact that he won't pursue marriage and follow the conventional views. As Jeff looks out to newlywedded couple being affectionate with each other, Stella shames him for his lack of own commitment, calling him a 'window shopper'. Prior to Stella's introduction where she admonishes Jeff for the 'trouble' he may cause, the spectators see Thorwald tenderly touch his flowers and water them. This symbolism of water 'hiding dark desires' is purposely played before the introduction of Stella. Hitchcock implicates water as hiding the immoral acts and fantasy of men, with their deep desire of to become a bachelor. Following an argument with his wife, Thorwald contains his *frustration* through 'watering' and fulfilling the dark desires, with the outcome, in Thorwald's perception, being the lively flowers. This can be attributed to Jeff fulfil his desire of bachelorhood through peering into the private lives of others, including the burlesque dancer. Stella, being the voice of America, is the notion of bringing Jeff to the decency of 1950 conservative values, hence, dejects the voyeuristic behaviour.

Jeff physically suffers the consequences of obsessive voyeurism, condemning this activity as selfish, distancing and while it may initially be to avoid, ultimately leaves a man vulnerable to marriage. Rear Window begins with a panoramic view of an apartment complex where each window resembles a multitude of theatre plays for the audience's consumption. Shot from the point of view of Jeff, positions the audience as spectator (much like Jeff), where we peer into the residents' private lives, as the camera moves slowly from right to left. This panoramic filmic element alludes the presentiment of immorality, as the movement opposes the Western norm of movement from left to right. Directly following this movement, the camera focuses on a close-up of Jeff, suggesting that the reverse movement would be reflected to Jeff, who will suffer the consequences. Hitchcock utilises the anti-clockwise movement to reinforce Jeff's physical constraint may ultimately endanger the physical and

emotional intimacy of relationships. The camera returns to the stand, and it focuses on Jeff's encased leg that reads "here lie the bones of L.B Jefferies", suggesting the metaphoric death of his bachelorhood-reminding him of his next job; to get married. From here it pans to the table with tools of a voyeur, the close up of a Speed Graphic Camera, followed but the dangerously wild shots define his careers and its proud highlights. Although his leg is encased because of his dangerous pursuit for recording violent images, his obsession does not cease the 'diseased' voyeurism. His voyeurism through the rear window doesn't only harm him physically but also initially stands as an obstacle from forming the conventional relationship with Lisa. Wanting to become intimate with Jeff, Lisa tells him to 'pay attention on me[her]', where he doesn't reciprocate the affection, with his 'mind' on the crime he supposedly suspected. Lisa goes to the extent of pulling the wheelchair away from the window, and pulling the shades down, but fails from stopping Jeff's avidly committed voyeuristic behaviour and from getting his attention. Both his encased legs are salient reminders that is in 'unethical' to pry into other lives. The desire to *watch* the sexualised violence of Thorwald killing his wife and then potentially assaulting and raping his girlfriend is presented by Hitchcock Which consequently injured his other leg, causing him to be encased and wheelchair ridden. Becoming impotent, Jeff is forced into the 'conventional' and moral 1950s relationship with the 'too perfect' Lisa. Hence, obsessive voyeurism is condemned by Hitchcock, presented with a final repercussion, of a physically restricted 1950s marriage and further immobility.

Hitchcock presents the growing independence of women in post-war America, but ultimately presents the condemnation of it through the male gaze of the characters. During world war 2 in America, women had attained a greater awareness of their potential and essentially had become more independent. Hitchcock crafts the character of Lisa Fremont as financially empowered and successful professional in the growing world of fashion and journalism. Yet, for social acceptability, and the patriotic rebuilding in a post-war America- Lisa, along with other women of the society, were obliged to insert themselves into a utopian conventional marriage-aided by the male gaze. Hitchcock juxtaposes Jeff's and Lisa's independence through their purposeful introduction. The slowly opening tracking shot focuses on the photographs of violence and 'wild[ness]' that Jeff took as a professional voyeur- highlighting the importance of masculinity to his self-identity. Hence the notion of tension in the film comes from the state of impotence and castration of Jeff, and hence his emasculation. In contrast, Lisa leads an active and busy life. Hitchcock juxtaposes her role in the relationship through her symbolically moving around his apartment and turning on three lamps, and introducing herself in three parts- 'Lisa, Carol, Fremont'. However, this growing active role of women is suppressed due to its embodiment by male gaze. Jeff resents this reversal of traditional gender roles and doesn't want to get married to Lisa as she is 'too perfect', and would only 'if she was ordinary'. Threatened by Lisa's assertiveness and fear of further entrapment to his masculinity, Jeff adopts the male gaze to perpetuate the patriarchal system. He resents being in relationship with an active individual like Lisa, so instead Jeff gains his version of self-identity and masculinity by making women spectacles. He becomes a voyeur, and looks out through his rear window merely objectifying the women; labelling the burlesque dancer as a 'Miss Torso'.