

3:10 to Yuma

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Based on a short story by Elmore Leonard

The virtues of most of the classic Westerns are simplicity and economy. Characters are often archetypes. This doesn't mean they are stereotypes, simply that they represent elemental human virtues and failings. Dialogue tends to be spare, simple and direct. The lines are active (thought-as-action) and speech has an immediate purpose and effect. Story construction usually has the same kind of directness, with a powerful narrative drive. Delmer Daves' *3:10 to Yuma* is very typical of the genre. It makes a good model from which to illustrate terms useful to the student of dramatic structure: character-in-action, exposition-under-tension, confrontation, etc.

Characterisation and Themes

DAN EVANS

At the start of the story, Dan Evans is a defeated man, a loser. He is physically courageous and he is good with a gun, but because he is a peaceful man, these qualities have been of little use to him. He is a good and hardworking homesteader, but has had the ill fortune to have settled on land which has no access to water. His neighbors, who do have water, insist on payment for watering rights, and there has been a long spell of drought, killing many of Evans' cattle. He is a good husband and father, but he has begun to feel that both his wife and two sons are disappointed in him. The sense that he might be losing their respect has made him lose respect for himself. Embittered and preoccupied with his own personal troubles, he has lost all interest in the problems of the community, taking no part in their struggle to build a respect for law and order and social responsibility. That, as he says, "is not my job." The events of the story, along with certain aspects of his character, which he has suppressed, will prove him very wrong. Evans is, in fact, a natural leader.

ALICE EVANS

A devoted mother and loyal wife, she doesn't really understand her husband, and perhaps not entirely herself. There may be some truth in Evans' suspicion that she is disappointed in her husband, even if Alice cannot entirely admit it to herself. Certainly, she finds herself uncomfortably disturbed by Ben Wade, but also excited by his recklessness, his reputation for violence and success with women. In the final crisis, it will be Alice who is most terrified when she recognises in her husband a strength of fierce pride and a determination which is more than a match for Ben Wade's ruthlessness.

BEN WADE

On the face of it, Wade is everything that Evans is not. He has an overwhelming self-confidence. He is totally cynical, but has learned to cover this cynicism with enormous charm and deprecating humor. His strongest characteristic is an uncanny capacity to recognise weakness in others. At heart, he despises people and finds private pleasure in manipulating them. His success with women is mostly vanity, the exercise of well-rehearsed techniques of seduction. He probably is not really interested in women (his speech to Evans on the comforts of matrimony and family life is nothing but another attempt to probe a vulnerable area in Evans). If he has any emotional commitment, it is probably in his gang. (The adoration that he inspires in his second-in-command is a mite suspect.)

Wade becomes interested in Evans as he begins to discover that this defeated and impoverished homesteader is a worthy adversary, someone not nearly as easy to corrupt as any of the others whom Wade has known. Like many men of his character, Wade is apt to be more intrigued by his natural enemies than by his friends. His final gesture of self-sacrifice – the moment of truth when he decides not to use his chance of escape by exposing Evans to death at the hands of his own men – is really no great thing. Wade is confident enough that he will not spend too much time in prison. He has solved that problem often enough before. But it is, for Ben Wade, one more small demonstration of his capacity for chivalry, one more gesture of showing off. Significantly, it's for the benefit of Ben Evans. Like innumerable Westerns, *3:10 to Yuma* is a love story between two men.

Every other character in the film is relatively secondary, by comparison more two-dimensional, in the sense that they don't have the extra dimension of character progression that illustrates the main themes.

THE TWO EVANS BOYS

They function as foils for their father and mother. The older son is a personification of the cautious and timid characteristics of Alice and the insecurity of Dan. The youngest son is less mature, more reckless, and personifies the part of his father's personality which is nearer to Ben Wade. The small boy is a signpost to the final reversal of relationship between Evans and Wade.

EMMY

Like Evans, she is a loser, except that for her, there can be no reversal. She is tubercular and expects nothing. Her plot function is obvious enough: she is the reason for Ben Wade's single gesture of incompetence, the cause of his capture. (Any other mistake by Wade would seriously weaken the strength of his character, but sexual susceptibility is generally a sympathetic trait.) Thematically she has another function: she is for Wade what Alice is for Evans. She may also be some reassurance to the audience that Wade is not homosexual in the way that the figure of the henchman might imply. Note, however, that she has to disappear from the story in order that the relationship between Wade and Evans can become the central spine of the action.

POTTER

A clown figure, also what is sometimes called a shadow figure (compare him to the Fool in Shakespeare's *King Lear*). He is a kind of undignified echo of the protagonist. Note that the death of Potter is the trigger to the final resolution of character conflict within Evans. It is the "death" of that part of Evans which is holding him back from the man that he must become. Potter's continuing role of comic relief provides a certain variety of mood without which the story would become more monotonous. But this has to be abandoned in the final stages when the tension has to be in dead earnest.

BUTTERFIELD

The owner of the stagecoach line is, obviously, a figure that represents the establishment. As such, he is an essential thematic element, a personification of law and order. Significantly, however, he is a false figure. Like Alice, Butterfield will, in the final crisis, bring pressure on the protagonist to abandon his duty. Butterfield ostensibly is the one who calls on the community for the need to take a stand against the threat represented by the Wade gang, but from the beginning Butterfield always offers money as the incentive. He buys what should be offered as a duty. At the outset he buys Dan Evans, although later Ben Wade outbids him. It is this that exposes to us – and, indeed, to Wade and even Evans himself – to the fact that money is not Evans' real incentive.

THE OTHERS

The MARSHALL, his DEPUTY, the BROTHER of the dead stagecoach driver and all of the TOWNFOLK in both Bisby, as well as the five deputised citizens of Contention City, represent society and the environment of the West. A characteristic of every Western, however, is that society is seen as morally weak, at the mercy of the villains, in this case Ben Wade and his gang.

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1) Desert. The stagecoach approaching. In foreground, cattle straying across the trail. Some mounted men are with them. They show no sign of clearing the cattle from the path, and the DRIVER realises that it is an ambush. He raises his hands as he sees the robbers have the stagecoach surrounded, their guns covering him.

BUTTERFIELD, the owner of the stagecoach line, is inside. "These are my passengers," he warns the robbers. "If you harm any of them, I'll hound you from here to Kingdom Come!" BEN WADE, the leader of the gang, is disarming. "We don't aim to harm anyone, Mister Butterfield. We just aim to get what's under that tarpaulin." One of the robbers climbs up beside the DRIVER to uncover the strong box that is on the roof of the stagecoach.

2) Ridge. DAN EVANS, from whose nearby ranch the WADE GANG have taken the cattle, appears with his two sons, one of them about fourteen, the other about nine. All three are on horseback. Seeing their lost animals, the YOUNGEST SON wants to go after them, but EVANS, who has seen what is happening, discourages the boy. "Let the dust settle first."

3) Wade's second-in-command, the HENCHMAN, calls the attention of his boss to the presence of the three figures on the ridge. WADE and the HENCHMAN wheel their mounts, gallop up the slope to confront the intruders, and order them to stay where they are and that they will get their cattle back in five minutes.

4) WADE and the HENCHMAN rejoin their companions as the robber beside the DRIVER of the stage is trying to maneuver the heavy strong box down from the roof. The ROBBER momentarily loses his balance and the DRIVER sees his chance. He seizes the man from behind, using him as a shield as he pulls his own gun. "Don't move or I'll kill him!" he says.

Without hesitation, WADE whips out his own gun. His first shot hits the ROBBER, who falls off the stagecoach, exposing the DRIVER to WADE's second shot. WADE dismounts and tells his gang to put the body of the robber he has shot up onto his horse.

Up on the ridge, EVANS' son asks him if he is going to do anything. "And get myself shot too?" responds EVANS. "That must be Ben Wade and his gang."

WADE stands beside the stagecoach. "What's his name?" asks WADE, indicating the dead DRIVER. BUTTERFIELD, coldly, says that his employee was called Bill Moons and came from Contention City. WADE tells BUTTERFIELD to take the body there. BUTTERFIELD says he cannot do this because he has to take his passengers to Bisby. "Then take him to Bisby and put him on the next stagecoach back," says WADE. "Where a man lives, that's where he should be buried."

5) WADE and the HENCHMAN gallop up to EVANS and his sons. WADE demands that they give him their horses. "Why?" protests EVANS. "So you don't ride to the Marshall," he is told. EVANS dismounts and his two boys follow suit. WADE reassures them that they will get the horses back, that he will set them loose outside Bisby. As the HENCHMAN and WADE gallop away again, leading the three mounts of the EVANS' family, the YOUNGEST SON calls after them. "You wait! My pa will kill you!"

BUTTERFIELD descends from the stagecoach as the robbers disappear into the distance. He intercepts EVANS, asking for help. EVANS is more concerned about recovering his herd, but says that when he has taken the cattle to his ranch he will send some horses back for the stagecoach.

6) Evans Ranch. ALICE EVANS is on the porch of the ranchhouse, a small and unimpressive structure in the center of parched desert. Seeing her husband and the boys returning on foot, she comes anxiously to meet them. What happened? Where are their horses? The BOYS eagerly recount the incident of the hold-up, the ruthless behavior of the man who shot one of his own gang just to be able to kill the driver. EVANS corroborates their report, adding that it was Ben Wade. ALICE reacts to the name. When the YOUNGER SON explains that they did nothing but just watch, the OLDER SON, echoing his father's earlier comments, points out that there was nothing else that could be done. EVANS, obviously himself chagrined at the incident, shuts the boys up, telling them to saddle the horses that they will take back to the stranded stagecoach.

ALICE follows her husband as he moves to the water barrel. Sensing EVANS' frustration, she tries to comfort him. It's terrible to be helpless, to be able to do nothing but stand by and watch such things. EVANS retorts in bitterness. Lots of things are terrible, things that you can't do anything about. Does she think he can do anything about it when there's three years of drought and he has to watch his cattle dying? What does she expect of him? With some bitterness of her own, ALICE points out that the cattle on the neighboring ranch have water. Couldn't he get help from the neighbor? When he reminds her that water rights have to be bought with money, she pleads with him once again to consider going into town to see if he can't borrow a couple of hundred dollars. Borrowing money isn't begging. If they had just two hundred dollars it might save the cattle, and in six months there is bound to be rain again. Mollified, and regretting his outburst, EVANS promises that when he goes in to Bisby, he will see what can be done. ALICE and the BOYS watch him as he mounts to ride back towards Bisby.

7) Bisby. A small town, impoverished by the drought and with few inhabitants. Townsfolk stare as WADE and his men ride up and make for the saloon.

The saloon is empty but for the pretty EMMY, the barmaid. As the men line the counter, she pours drinks for them silently. WADE's HENCHMAN raises a glass to WADE and points out that there was no other way, that WADE had to kill one of his own men. "If it hadn't been goodbye for him, it could have been goodbye for some of the rest of us."

WADE tells EMMY that she should let the MARSHALL know that the stagecoach from Contention City was held up. "We passed it on the way in," he says. "They don't have any horses." EMMY is not unduly shocked and explains that the MARSHALL generally takes a nap about this time of day. The group is about to leave when the GIRL learns that a man was killed during the hold-up. Perhaps she should wake the MARSHALL after all. Robbery, it seems is not all that serious, but a killing...

The MARSHALL is summoned. The appearance of WADE's gang disturbs him and he does not seem impressed with their story that they are cowhands who have just finished a major cattle drive for which they have been well paid.

8) The MARSHALL organises the male citizenry of Bisby into a small posse. He calls up to a window for POTTER and a woman replies that POTTER is in no condition to join them. WADE watches the posse ride out of Bisby.

9) WADE orders his men to head out of town and informs them he will follow later. The gang leaves town on horseback. WADE flirts with EMMY by inquiring how lonely it must get. He enquires about her past, and she reveals she moved to Bisby because she has respiratory problems.

POTTER runs out of his house still dressing. The town drunk, he clearly has a bad hangover and tries in vain to mount his horse. After the third try he succeeds and follows the trail the posse took out of town.

WADE and EMMY talk in the saloon. Hasn't he seen her before? EMMY admits that she has worked in other towns and has been advised to come to Bisby for the sake of her health. A seduction scene, and with each question, WADE moves closer to her. He confides that he finds blue eyes very attractive. She counters that she has brown eyes. They kiss.

10) Outside Bisby. The posse meets up with BUTTERFIELD and they realise that the men who announced the robbery were in fact the robbers themselves. POTTER arrives with the news that he has seen one of the robbers still in town before he left.

11) Saloon. EMMY and BEN return from a back room. She explains that you can know some men for ten years, but a single meeting can sometimes last a lifetime. The HENCHMAN arrives to inquire why WADE hasn't left the town.

WADE is preparing to leave when EVANS walks in and complains of how long it took him to round up the cattle that WADE's gang had dispersed. WADE pays EVANS two dollars and adds some extra for the time EVANS' boys put in. EVANS surprises WADE by asking him for more money. As WADE searches in his pockets, shadows start to move in the background. Outside, the HENCHMAN sees the MARSHALL's men moving in towards the saloon. He yells out a warning to WADE and rides off.

12) Saloon. WADE has been disarmed, but he warns his captors that his HENCHMAN will return with the rest of his gang. MARSHALL tells WADE that he will be long gone by the time they get back. The MARSHALL tries to get EVANS to hold a shotgun on WADE but he refuses. The MARSHALL hands the shotgun to EVANS' NEIGHBOR, then exits to plan what is to be done with WADE. EVANS tries to strike a deal with his NEIGHBOR as WADE watches quietly. The NEIGHBOR tells EVANS he cannot help him out. EVANS exits to join the others.

Outside, the MARSHALL asks for two volunteers for his plan. BUTTERFIELD offers \$200 to the person who will carry it out. EVANS accepts, and POTTER offers his services as well.

13) The stagecoach arrives in Bisby and WADE, who is handcuffed, is led out from the saloon. EMMY opens the door of the stagecoach for him. He stops and promises to send her some nice things so she won't forget him. She earnestly replies that she will never forget him. Men board the stagecoach and the rest mount their horses. The stagecoach leaves town. Crane shot of EMMY as she watches the stagecoach leave. She will never see WADE again.

14) EVANS' property. The stagecoach that carries WADE is being watched from afar by WADE's gang. The MARSHALL spots the henchmen and the stagecoach stops when its wheel appears to be stuck in a ditch. The MARSHALL's party gathers to pull the wheel out. WADE is secretly taken off the stagecoach and delivered to EVANS and POTTER, who take him into EVANS' house. The MARSHALL's plan works: WADE's henchmen believe he is still on the stagecoach and proceed to follow it as it moves away from EVANS' property.

15) EVANS' house. WADE is taken inside. POTTER asks the oldest EVANS boy if he knows where the whisky is kept. The boy answers an earnest, "No sir." POTTER asks the boy if he doesn't mind him asking. The boy answers, "No sir, my father told me you would."

16) At dinner, EVANS' youngest son taunts WADE about his bad manners, but WADE responds with a smile and gracious words. EVANS offers to cut WADE's steak because he is handcuffed. Outside, POTTER lets out a shot. EVANS runs outside and POTTER explains he thought he heard something. EVANS reminds him that the shooting might bring WADE's gang in this direction. EVANS starts into the house and stops when he sees WADE talking to ALICE about the color of her eyes. EVANS calls her outside and reprimands her for just sitting and listening. She is worried about WADE's gang. He explains that by the time his men reach the stagecoach, he and WADE will be in Contention City waiting for the 3:10 train to Yuma. She tells EVANS that "the boys are so proud of you."

17) Before leaving, WADE thanks ALICE for her hospitality and adds, "Your husband too. I hope I can send him back to you all right." The boys question ALICE about their father's safety.

18) Contention City. BUTTERFIELD waits for EVANS, POTTER and WADE at the edge of town. He explains that they cannot stay in the house at the edge of the tracks and the only place they can hide in town is in a room at the hotel.

19) Hotel lobby. EVANS is apprehensive. WADE tells him to "relax. I'm practically on the train." They go upstairs. There is a sleeping figure on the lobby couch. The man's face is covered by a newspaper.

20) Hotel room. BUTTERFIELD tells EVANS that he has great confidence in him. EVANS responds: "It's not 3:10 yet." EVANS is left alone with WADE, who is on the bed, a few feet across from EVANS. EVANS tells WADE that he is doing this only for the money, but that he will shoot WADE if he needs to.

WADE complains of the heat and asks EVANS to open the window. EVANS tries to open the window but it won't stay open without a stick to prop it up. As EVANS tries to reach the stick, WADE rushes towards him. EVANS slams him down on the bed. WADE smiles and says, "I had to try you out." EVANS warns him that he will shoot him next time.

21) POTTER admits to BUTTERFIELD that it is the first time in a long while that he has not wanted to drink. BUTTERFIELD asks the clerk how long the sleeping man has been on the couch. The clerk says he has been there since early morning.

22) 11:00 o'clock. WADE offers EVANS double what BUTTERFIELD is giving him. EVANS evades WADE by telling him to look out the window. On the street below they see the funeral procession of the stagecoach DRIVER that WADE shot.

WADE explains he is no killer and that he killed the man in self-defense. WADE appeals to EVANS by calling him a reasonable man. "I'm so reasonable I'll let you walk right out of here," says EVANS. "The only thing is it will be just before 3:10 and I'll be right behind you with a shotgun."

23) Hotel lobby. The sleeping man on the sofa wakes up and removes the newspaper off his face. It is WADE's HENCHMAN. He asks the clerk if anyone has come in while he was asleep. The clerk assures him no one has.

24) WADE offers EVANS \$7000 if he lets him go. "Think it over. Nobody needs to know." Later, WADE offers \$10,000. "Do me a favor," says EVANS to WADE. "Don't talk to me for a while."

The funeral party has arrived in the hotel lobby. The BROTHER of the dead stagecoach DRIVER is angry with BUTTERFIELD. He bursts into the hotel room upstairs and threatens to kill WADE. EVANS disarms him and knocks him down, but the gun goes off and from the street the HENCHMAN sees WADE through a hotel room. The HENCHMAN gets on his horse and heads out of town. WADE explains to EVANS and BUTTERFIELD that his gang would have found him no matter what. Their plan is always to send a man to each surrounding town should this scenario occur.

EVANS and BUTTERFIELD know they need more men, but the BROTHER of the stagecoach DRIVER won't stay to help get WADE to the train station. He says it wouldn't be a "fair fight." WADE looks out of the window and sees that the street is empty.

25) Bisby. ALICE on her buckboard approaches a group of older women. They want to know where EVANS and POTTER are. They wave goodbye as ALICE gallops out of the city. Dissolve to her crossing the plains.

26) Hotel room. EVANS rolls a cigarette and WADE lies on the bed staring at the ceiling. WADE asks EVANS what time it is. EVANS tells him it is 2:30. WADE reminds him he has half an hour “to decide.” BUTTERFIELD arrives to say he has five men who will help out against WADE’s gang.

27) WADE reminds EVANS of his family and “how pleasant it is to have one.” WADE also tells EVANS that he should treat his wife better. “I wouldn’t make my wife work so hard. I’ll bet your wife was a real beautiful girl, before she met you.” EVANS is furious and threatens to kill WADE, then say that it was in self-defense. WADE calmly counters with an observation about how the streets are empty. “I guess everyone wants to get in out of the heat.”

28) WADE’s gang arrives in Contention City. The men that BUTTERFIELD has assembled are armed in the saloon of the hotel. The HENCHMAN calls up to the hotel room from the street, asking if WADE is all right, and then adds, “Ben, you better tell them what will happen if we hear a gun go off.” WADE smiles and says, “He knows.” WADE’s gang scatters and hides. WADE again tries to convince EVANS to let him go. EVANS gets angry and throws his watch against the wall.

29) The group of five men downstairs decide that they now don’t want to get involved. BUTTERFIELD offers each of them fifty dollars, but they explain that this is not their fight and question why he brought his problems to Contention City.

Inside the hotel room, WADE tells EVANS that BUTTERFIELD will also walk out on him. EVANS has his back to the window while he listens to WADE. Outside, one of WADE’s gang prepares to shoot him. From the street POTTER lets out a warning cry. EVANS turns and shoots WADE’s man off the roof. The HENCHMAN gets behind POTTER and shoots him. POTTER’s body is dragged off by WADE’s gang.

30) BUTTERFIELD finds POTTER strung up in the hotel lobby. He rushes to the room to tell EVANS that he isn’t going through with it. “Now it’s one against seven,” says WADE.

Alice arrives in Contention City on her buckboard. Aghast at the sight of POTTER’s corpse, she goes upstairs to the room. EVANS leaves BUTTERFIELD holding the gun on WADE as he goes into the hall to talk to ALICE. She tells him not to go through with it. BUTTERFIELD assures him that if it’s the money he wants, he will give it to him anyway. EVANS explains that he has to do this, and promises ALICE he will give the children a memory they will never forget.

31) The clock strikes three. EVANS takes WADE down the stairs and tells BUTTERFIELD that he will go out the back way. He asks BUTTERFIELD to take ALICE back to Bisby. EVANS and WADE walk onto the street. One of WADE's gang tries to shoot EVANS from behind, but misses. EVANS takes care in crossing a corner that is being covered by WADE's gang. Suddenly a herd of cattle stampedes through town. EVANS takes WADE and uses the cattle as cover. Seeing this, WADE's men mount their horses and head for the train tracks.

32) EVANS and WADE are facing the tracks. WADE's gang dismounts and position themselves to shoot EVANS. EVANS takes a horse and uses it for cover as he leads WADES to the tracks. The horse rears up and WADE's gang shoot at EVANS but miss him as he hides behind the train building. The train arrives. WADE's gang has every approach to the train covered. The HENCHMAN has spotted EVANS and is crawling towards him. The train conductor gets out and checks for passengers. He boards the train again and the steam engine is started up again.

33) As the train pulls out EVANS grabs WADE and starts to run with him along the tracks. WADE's gang starts to follow, but cannot see WADE and EVANS because of the smoke. EVANS pulls WADE with him as the smoke clears. WADE tells him to jump onto the train and that he will follow. EVANS asks how he can be sure. WADE counters he has no choice and adds that EVANS will have to trust him. EVANS jumps and in and is followed by WADE. WADE's gang starts shooting as they try and follow the train. EVANS shoots the HENCHMAN and he falls to the ground. The train leaves the rest of WADE's gang behind.

34) Inside the open car EVANS asks WADE why he did it. He answers that EVANS had saved his life back in the hotel room and he never wanted to owe anybody anything. He also adds that he has broken out of Yuma before. It begins to rain. EVANS looks out to see BUTTERFIELD and ALICE on the buckboard to Bisby. ALICE waves at him. The train heads on to YUMA. Fade in obnoxious song.