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Film 3120

Short Essay

Putting Marriage in Perspective

Alfred Hitchcock’s *Rear Window* is a pretty accurate representation of real life for a number of reasons. For one, it maintains a low but steady level of excitement for at least a little while in the happenings and events of the surrounding apartments. We see a man who is nevertheless addicted to watching it and finds nearly all his entertainment from said dramas, which is something that nearly all of us can relate to (and if you can’t, you’re probably lying). Another is the realistic relationship between the neighbors of the complex. There never exists much interaction between tenants of different homes; only a fairly civil tolerance and acceptance of one another’s existence is needed. But the factor that represents one side of the issue and is explored quite heavily in this film is the issue of marriage. The single most important idea that was conveyed with this film is that marriage is an act of weakness, that it arises despite all human relationships being flawed and sometimes meaningless out of a desire to not be alone. Hitchcock’s opinion of marriage is expressed with honesty and realism in character relationships, but also through symbolism and alluding with other aspects of the film.

L. B. Jeffries is confined to a wheelchair, stuck in one spot at the window looking out into the inner workings of his apartment complex. We are led to believe early on that his only reason for constantly watching his neighbors in their every day lives through their own windows is due to the lack of anything else to do in his confined state. But we know better than this. For people, there exists such a strange fascination with seeing people do even the most mundane tasks when they don’t know they’re being watched. We want to see how much like us they are, how similar they choose to act and live, and how their relationships with others mirror or contrast our own. The scene where we meet Lisa, they watch out the window into Miss Lonelyheart’s apartment at her sad attempt to recreate a romantic evening with an invisible man. Jeffries tells Lisa that, fortunately, she will not have to worry about ever being alone like that. Lisa asks, “Oh? You can see my apartment all the way up on 63rd street?” Jeffries then compares the apartment of Miss Torso’s to what he assumes Lisa’s is like, with three different men fighting for her attention in a loud and cheerful social gathering. Upon commenting on the man Torso seems to be giving the most attention to, Lisa declares that she can tell she doesn’t love him. Jeffries asks “How can you tell that from here?” to which she replies “You said it resembled my apartment, didn’t you?” Already we can see into Lisa’s own personal life, and also her emotional state, just by watching someone else. We are interested in the little events that make up other lives because we can relate to them, have been through most of them and go through them every day.

We never see very much interaction between the neighbors of the complex. For the most part, they all keep to themselves or their own circles of friends. But in a moment of drama and excitement, when one of the tenant’s dog is found strangled dead in the yard, the entire complex joins together to watch from their porches. No one but Miss Lonelyhearts actually offers any assistance, placing the body in the basket for the grieving tenants. The rest have only emerged to see what the fuss is all about, to “peep” in for a moment before returning to their lives. For the brief moment that she has their attention, the dog’s owner sobbingly declares for all to hear: “You don’t know the meaning of the word ‘neighbor’. Neighbors like each other – speak to each other – care if anybody lives or dies. But none of you do! You don’t talk, you don’t help, you don’t even see.” It serves as an interesting contrast to see the tendency of people to never want to be alone, but their unwillingness to reach out to their own neighbors. It shows itself to be true all too often outside of the cinema, which is naturally where Hitchcock must have drawn from.

In this piece where human relationships are explored almost as a whole, Hitchcock uses the highly realistic dialogue, sets, and characters to convey a certain point of view about marriage. In every relationship and household analyzed in the movie, there is some issue of marriage that exists. Miss Lonelyhearts lives in the absence of marriage, as well as the piano player and Miss Torso. Miss Torso lives her life being courted by many men, but even when she’s completely alone we see her prancing about happily in her apartment. At the end of the film, we find out that she’s had a lover the entire time; a short, nerdy soldier who’s just returned from the war into her eager outstretched arms. The piano player has his moments of frustration and sadness, which are a result of alcohol and some unseen events in his life. But the next day, we see him receive comfort from his music, cleaning, and throwing parties with good company. Miss Lonelyhearts suffers visibly from her solitude daily; we see her creating false encounters, crying herself to sleep, and rejecting men who don’t fit her ideal of a proper husband. The women here are only content if they have some prospect of being married one day, and the man is seemingly not as concerned. The young married couple who moves are a telling example of how marriage is viewed in the film. We see the stages of their marriage throughout the mere few days the story takes place in, starting out blissfully happy, engaging in play behind closed curtains, becoming sick of said play, and then we end with a scene of their bickering.

But undoubtedly, the two most important relationships in the film also create the most important ideas on marriage. These are the relationship between Lisa and Jeffries, and that of Lars Thorwald and his wife. Jeffries is as obsessed with avoiding marriage with Lisa as she is with convincing him to marry her. Rarely are their intentions ever stated outright, but they dance around them with comments about the other tenants. Jeffries fears about marriage are only confirmed with the most important plot element; the investigation and potential idea that Thorwald has murdered his wife. Jeffries was witness to her constant nagging and neediness, and he even makes a comment to his editor about how all wives nag. He sees that Thorwald’s last chance for escape was through murder, and he goes through with it. Although the film ends cheerfully, with Jeffries sleeping peacefully next to an accommodating Lisa, things have not been resolved. Juxtaposed with the image of the bickering newly weds, I believe that this does not bode well for Jeffries and Lisa’s relationship.

Marriage is undoubtedly a commonplace strategy in life, but is nevertheless interesting when we analyze it. Alfred Hitchcock’s *Revolver* serves to do just that, allowing us to question things that society seems already so set upon and whether it’s the right thing for everyone.