

British civilization through art : Snatch

By Guy Ritchie, 2000

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The movie *Snatch*, realized and written by Guy Ritchie in 2000, talks about how the main character (and narrator) named Turkish and his friend Tommy got their hands on a huge diamond. To tell the story, Guy Ritchie makes us follow different interlinked stories with different characters in each of them.

The first noticeable British feature in the movie is the setting. All the action (except for some scenes of people on the phone) takes place in London and its surroundings. This influences the accents the different characters use during the film. For example, Turkish and Tommy, who are quite poor and trying to make enough money to live comfortably, have a Cockney accent. Through British culture, we can deduce that they come from the working-class of London, which suits their character well and adds to the realism of the movie. In comparison, Doug "The Head" Denovitz, a rich jeweler, is portrayed with an upper-class English accent. However, not all the accents are English. One of the main characters is an Irish traveler called Mickey O'Neil who speaks with a highly exaggerated version of the Pikey accent. His accent is a running gag throughout the whole movie. Another non-English accent we can find in *Snatch* is Bullet Tooth Tony's. He speaks with a Scottish accent, which goes well with his role as an enforcer for the London gangsters.

Along with the accents, we can also quickly notice the slang used by the different characters. Obviously, Mickey talks Pikey so his whole way of speaking is a mixture of an unintelligible Irish accent and traveler's slang. But even by removing Mickey from the equation, all the characters use a lot of British slang. The movie even calls this out in a scene where Bullet Tooth Tony tells Cousin Avi (a big time American mobster) that "the bookie got blagged", to which Cousin Avi responds "Blagged ? Speak English to me Tony", emphasizing on the British nature of the speeches all along the movie.

Another very British aspect of the movie is the centering of the plot on petty gangster activities. This directly echoes to the British gangster genre which contrasts with the very over the top and grand American gangster genre. In *Snatch*, the characters engage in petty crime such as robbing a bookie, organizing illegal boxing matches (which is very British in itself) and rigging the fights to make money of their bets. In the movie, the only big mafia boss is Cousin Avi, an American, and is just the instigator of the plot, he doesn't do much except checking on how things are going. All the other characters are British (except for one Russian) and look more like small-time criminals rather than leaders of organized crime. This is typical of the British gangster genre that often focuses on the gritty and grounded aspect of organized crime.

If you look up the movie online, you'll see it classified as a thriller and a comedy. This is due to the presence of British humor that often comes with the British gangster genre. In the movie, the characters don't hesitate to be cynical and deliver sharp punchlines to each other. The dialogue is often quick and really made me feel the movie as being British. The aspect that I really enjoy about British humor, and that is omnipresent in *Snatch*, resides in how easily the characters accept the

chaos and the absurdity of certain situations. For example, in the beginning of the movie, a dog swallows a squeaky toy. And from this point on, the dog will squeak when other characters encounter it. And almost all of them doesn't question why he is squeaking like that and just complain about it making noise. Another shorter but very funny example is the origin of Turkish's name. His parents survived a plane crash and named their according to the airline company. When I look back at the movie, I think it's not far fetched to say that the whole plot is completely chaotic and absurd but still makes a lot of sense. These kinds of scenarios feel very British to me.

Finally, the last aspect of British culture I am going to talk about will be the fashion. The characters wear very British outfits that can tell a lot about their place in society. Of course, we won't talk about Doug "The Head" Denovitz who dresses Jewish because he thinks it's good for business. Just like we talked about earlier with the accents, we can see that Turkish and Tommy come from a working-class background by their outfits. They have dark colored clothes that look used up and that blend in well with the city. In contrast, Brick Top, a known and gangster who feeds his enemies to his pigs, wears trench coats and nice shoes which reminds me of old-school British gangsters such as the Peaky Blinders.

In conclusion, I find that *Snatch* reflects a strong British identity and really deserves its place in the UK's cultural landscape.