Daniel Shu

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Peter Hurley

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Saturday Night and Sunday Morning and the British New Wave

        Throughout history in Britain, the trend and idea of film has evolved drastically. In the 1950’s and 1960’s, British New Wave was introduced to the Cinema after a massive acceleration in production, rise in wages, and boom of consumerism. Prior to the British New Wave, Britain film was mostly encompassed by the upper class and the harsh realities of the working class was quickly marginalized throughout the industry. The British New Wave however, not only brought changes to film, but also paved the way for other aspects of society to evolve. A film that is greatly represented by the British New Wave would be *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning* by Tony Richardson about the obstacles a young man in the working class runs into. This movie contains various elements from the New Wave movement and the movie reflects the changes that normal people from society went through in the New Wave. The British New Wave was characterized by the emergence of a new social formation of a better-educated, smart, younger people who advocated for the new meritocratic environment. Moreover, the New Wave is further provoked by the fact that the war had come prior to it, which is justified by the men coming back home from the war and leading to shifts of roles for most in society and readjustment of the film industry. *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning* truly allows the audience to feel the New Wave throughout the controversial topics touched throughout the plot.

The movement was quite a large change for most in the film industry, particularly for movie writers. For example, British60scinema states “One of the reasons the New Wave films were so popular is the strong anti-establishment attitude of many of the central protagonists none more so than Finney as Arthur Seaton in S*aturday Night and Sunday Morning*. In one scene, which was very emblematic of the New Wave, in that Arthur Seaton was working the machineries at his job and emphatically expressing his grief and irritation at his job that he seems to be unable to get away from. He talks about how he would much rather be out for “a good time, and all the rest is propaganda.” This is the first time that he is introduced to us as an unambitious young man who doesn’t seem to put school as his top priority and liked to have fun. This is further exemplified by his beer drinking contest, getting so drunk that he poured his beer over some middle aged woman at the pub after denying to apologize and falling down the stairs and being too wasted to get up. The British New Wave is revolved around the shift in attitude from that of Arthur Seaton’s to a much more academically oriented one. The attitude that Seaton portrays implies that he has no plans to set his life straight, after accounting for the fact that he had a pregnant girlfriend named Brenda, who had a husband and kids, and cheated on her with another single woman named Doreen. This is the first time that British film has delved into topics of taboo including an anti-social protagonist which overall questions the morality of the characters and the type of social environment that is present in the film.

The character of Arthur Seaton greatly reflects attributes of the entire working-class culture as someone who joylessly works all day and night yet longs to have fun. His character is extremely confident, selfish, arrogant, and wild. In the film, he treats his neighbor Mrs. Bull rudely and calls her “bitch” and “whore” showing no respect towards her and exemplifying his rebellious nature. The fact that Mrs. Bull is older also shows that he disrespects the older generation as they symbolize tradition, something Arthur is not fond of. This was especially shocking to me because of the manifest difference between the way younger people treat elders from back then and contemporary times. As Arthur progresses towards the end of the film with his stubborn, self-interested ways, he gets a splash of reality. The woman he cheats on his pregnant girlfriend with’s husband finds out that Brenda was pregnant and that she has been having secret affairs with Arthur. Subsequently, he asks his brother in the army and a fellow soldier to chase Arthur and give him a beat down after finding him at the fair with Brenda. What perplexed me was the fact that after finding out Brenda’s husband was suspecting him of cheating on her and Brenda was desperately attempting to get away from him to hide from her husband at the fair, he does the opposite of the rationale and does whatever he can to stay with her. Although this was indicative of his bold and confident personality, this got him found and eventually beaten. After the incident, he was forced to keep astray from Brenda and her soon-to-be-born child. Ironically, he catches Brenda’s husband at work and has a brief conversation with him that had a profound impact on his perception. Brenda’s husband tells him “You’re too much of a troublemaker. You need to go enjoy life.” to which Arthur replies “I do enjoy life. Just because I’m not like you, don’t think I don’t!” This was greatly representative of the two sides of the society that are present in the film. Arthur represents the disobedient, crazy side while Brenda’s husband represents the traditional side of society. After not being able to see her for a while and a prolonged series of encounters with Doreen, he starts to realize the mischief and disruption that was in his prior life. This is the first time Arthur sees that he may need to change his ways in order to be a better, functional human being in society and that he needed to grow up. This change in perception is remarkably emblematic of the changes that went through the British New Wave, as Arthur’s mindset changed from childish to mature and stable.

An important factor that added to the shock the audience experienced back in 1961 when first watching the movie included Arthur’s behavior and interaction towards women. He treated many of the women he dated with little respect and acted much more brazen to them than normally seen in movies during that time. His forceful suggestion of having an abortion towards Brenda is one of the many encounters in which he acted boldly and aggressively. He did not act this way only to women that he dated but it is shown that his behavior to his mother indicated that he was not very sympathetic with her. His reasoning behind this behavior towards his mom was the fact that he was the breadwinner of the household, which ultimately gave him dominance. Additionally the language throughout the film was extremely vulgar and profane, which almost created a problem with The British Board of Film Censors in which they urged the directors to tone down the language as well as the intensity of the sex scenes throughout the film. Moreover, another controversy with the film was that the female roles did not have much impact throughout the film, in that they never associated with a strong, leading role. This created backlash at the making of the film, but it suggests that during the New Wave, women’s roles were still not completely set in stone and the upbringing of their significant roles had yet to come. Not to mention, the tendency for the filmmakers to emphasize the masculinity stayed strong throughout the film, as Arthur’s character embodied all the elements of masculinity at some point.

All in all, Saturday Night and Sunday Morning was an integral part of the British New Wave as it opened the eyes of viewers to the harsh realities of the working class. Moreover, it also was the first film to depict such controversial topics such as infidelity, and abortion, which greatly affected the film industry. I found this film to be extremely enjoyable for its depiction of social realism. All aspects of the film including characters, plot, and social environment were well thought out and portrayed perfectly. The symbolism of Arthur’s change in outlook within the film links amazingly with the change that was embedded in the New Wave. Although technically the British New Wave began before the release of Saturday Night and Sunday Morning, this movie truly advanced the movement and influenced many others to partake in it. If it were not for the making of this film and the overall movement, film today would lackadaisical in crucial elements that make a film seem real and authentic. Moreover, this film raised the concern of people who didn’t quite know what to do with their life, and greatly escalated the power of the academy. The rebellious and confident character of Arthur Seaton brought a new type of film to Britain, one that reached new heights.

Works Cited

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