

The Beauty Insides Recaps

A recap is not simply a summary of the main plot of a TV episode; it analyzes and brings out the art integrated inside each episode. A good TV show should have lots of subtle artistry and expression as well as well-organized visual constructions that go into each episode. For example, in *Mad Men*, Betty's careful choices of outfit reflect her current mental state as well as her character development. In early season one, Betty is introduced as the perfect and innocent housewife that every man would dream of. She always wears beautiful and elegant and sometimes very colorful dresses in front of other people, including her husband, to show her perfection. When she is at home doing the housework, Betty usually wears white dresses, which indicates her innocence. Despite the fact that her husband is having affairs with other women, she still stays by his side as a perfect and naive wife. Not until the end of season one that Betty's outfit style changes. She starts to pick darker color outfits; surprisingly, she even wears horse riding outfit in season two, which completely contradicts to her usual elegant collection of dresses in season one. These outfits are not selected randomly.

As viewers, we rarely pay attention to the underlying meaning of their outfit choices. However, we have to admit that certain outfit choices help us understand the characters better: their ways of thinking, their situations, and their evolutions. In other words, small, and perhaps seemingly trivial details, can say a great deal about the characters or the storyline; they add up the effect and enhance our experience while enjoying the show. Thus, the recap is the perfect place to dive into the meaning of those subtle yet powerful details.

Since there are so many aesthetically integrated details within each episode, we can have uncountable approaches to write a recap. As Matt Zoller Seitz, an American film and television

critic, points out that “There are as many ways to review a TV episode as there are to critique a movie, album, gallery exhibit, or novel.” () Some recaps focus on entertaining aspects such as the love-hate relationship between characters. Others shift its focus on analyzing specific angles such as mise-en-scene, fashion, art, marketing, philosophy, and so forth. However, no matter what the focus of the recap is, a good recap should be able to draw out interesting details that the audience cannot easily find out by themselves. That’s why recap attracts people: recaps provide different ways to interpret the show. The viewers want to be amazed while reading recaps, to say to themselves “Wow, I have never thought of that.”

Moreover, recaps are so much more than just displaying the underlying art integrated within each episode. Thanks to the development of the internet, recaps act as the starter of live conversations. Recaps that are written and shared on the internet allow fans to interact with each other in real time (quote). Fans get to really dive in deep with what the show is trying to say by reading sophisticated recaps as well as sharing their questions and thoughts in the comment section. These blogs or websites are an incredible exchange environment where people can have a virtual conversation with somebody who is as obsessed with the show as they are. In other words, fans read recaps not only to see what they have missed but also to find answers to questions that arise based on uncomfortable emotions or curiosity, such as why Dick Whitman (the current Don) steals the real Don identity? Did he do it on purpose? It is important to notice that not all questions have one correct answer. Thus, fans come to recap not to find one absolute answer but to discuss, debate and finally decide what to believe - beliefs or theories that work best for them. In conclusion, a recap is a free yet luxurious alternative way to enjoy the show.

Citation:

SEITZ, MATT ZOLLER. "About Recaps." *MAD MEN CAROUSEL: the Complete Critical Companion*. New York: Harry N Abrams, 2017. 17-21. Print

Recap: What's going on in that pretty mind of Betty?

SPOILER ALERT: Before you read this recap, get a frosty glass of Heineken and watch Mad Men: A Night to Remember (season 2, episode 8)

The episode starts with Betty riding a horse at dawn. Betty's life used to be surrounded by Don, housework, kids, and Don again. However, she starts to build up a hobby as a way to give herself some private space. Especially in this episode, Betty's ride acts as a temporary escape from her revealing unhappy married life. We can tell that Betty's trying to break free from stress and anxiety because she rides the horse at a very fast speed with no hesitation to stop or to look back. Moreover, this horse riding session also foreshadows her raising control later on in the episode. There is a close-up shot that focuses on Betty's eyes that shows a very strong and determined look while she is riding the horse at a gallop. Additionally, the camera keeps going back to Betty's solid grasp of the rein indicating that Betty is fully in control while riding the horse. This opening scene of her having control over her actions, which is riding a horse, implies that she will break herself out of the trapped marriage by gaining control over her own life.

That being said, this episode is surrounded by the descent of the Drapers' marriage. "A night to remember" literally refers to the flyer title that Peggy decides to use for the church's upcoming CYO dance event, but to me, the real night to remember is actually the dinner night at Betty's "perfect" house. Betty has endured this entire time; to some extent, she knows about Don's unpretty actions including his affairs yet she pushes her negative but real ideas to her

subconsciousness. However, “the dinner to remember”, or to be more precise, the Heineken beer puts a stop to her endurance. This is the point where she decides that she has had enough and it’s time for her to rise up.

The Heineken beer is the killing trigger that breaks their marriage apart. Don Draper conducts a survey by placing Heineken in supermarkets in suburban areas where the perfect housewives, like Betty, would choose sophisticated green bottles of Heineken over other brands. Just as Don assumes, Betty falls for Don’s marketing trick. He even uses his own wife to get the contract with Heineken by saying that his wife, Betty, picks Heineken for her fancy dinner menu and so will other targeted customers - perfect housewives who are, as Duck explains, “well-off, educated, with plenty of time to shop.”

Poor Betty. If not for this dinner night, she would never aware that she has been the experimental subject of Sterling Cooper. She is their targeted consumers. She is easily manipulated by companies like Sterling Cooper, and marketing people like her husband. Don knows Betty so well that he can easily dominate her emotionally. Usually, you would want the people you love to understand your feelings and thoughts because they must have really care about you in order to know the real you. However, in Betty case, Don doesn’t really show any love for her but rather he has been studying her, make her feel like she is loved but in fact, she is not. What kind of husband is Don, using his wife to gain business benefits? This is not the first time we see Don taking advantage of Betty. He requested Betty to go to a few fancy business dinners with him many times; she is like his private secretary but just not an official one. However, this time Don goes too far and Betty is done tolerating.

I love it when Betty repeat “you embarrassed me” 4 times; the last time she says it with a very powerful and bold voice (24:29). And then she starts bringing out Don’s affair with Bobbie. One problem is easy to fix but a couple serious problems combined lead to a dead end. Betty is going through her breaking point, where all of her underlying suspicious towards Don starts to come out all at once. Without this dinner night, Betty might never have had the guts to confront him about Bobbie. This time, Betty is really the one in charge, not Don. All Don can do is defending by playing the deny-deny-deny strategy.

When Don goes to work the next day, Betty, unchanged from her dinner dress, rummages through all Don’s clothes and drawers looking for evidence of Don’s love affairs. It’s heartbreaking to see her stepping on one the broken glass and one piece of the glass cut her foot as if it is cutting through her heart. The glass is broken and so does her naive love for Don. He doesn’t try to solve the problems. While being in the middle of a very serious fight, Don can easily go to bed. When Betty wake him up and ask Don quietly “do you hate me?”, he selfishly replies: “I love you, Bets. And I love children. I don’t want to lose all this.” His answer indicates that he doesn’t love Betty for who she is but rather for what she has given him - the pretentious perfect family with two lovely kids.

Unfortunately, Don hides so well that he leaves no evidence for Betty to dispose himself of his misdemeanor. Betty has to drop the argument because she can’t accuse him without any solid proof. However, her anger can never be dropped. That dinner night leaves her a scar that cannot be removed. She has been publicly embarrassed. The scene when Betty says through the phone: “Don, I don’t want to see you” is very powerful. She is fully in control of her actions and this relationship. She is done buying Don’s words and his pretentious actions. Moreover, the

oven near the end of the episode (43:47) also implies that her anger remains unchanged and there is nothing Don can do about it because he is not allowed to control her anymore. Betty is not the woman that believes she is happy because Don says so anymore. Congratulation Don, you just wake up a very angry version of Betty and you deserve it!

Some other thoughts on "A Night to Remember":

- While Betty was very serious about the dinner, Don tells Duck that Betty would rather go see a movie. No, No, No DON! This is not how you treat your wife.
- It is funny that while Betty is breaking the chair, a voice from the TV says: “Eh, who you hitting?”
- The kids are watching. They know more than you think. They watch their parents fight. They know Betty’s is not in a good mood through her actions of breaking the poor chair. Sally worries about her heartbroken mother, or perhaps her fragile family.
- Joan really likes her new temporary job. In fact, I think she is better at this job than Harry. It’s a terrible mistake to replace Joan with a random guy. Joan clearly has a talent because she gets the account executives to agree. Sadly, Joan’s beautiful appearance prevents her from being taken seriously. She appears to be just filling in until the position could be filled.
- Pete’s “Aren’t you going to invite me?” face was truly hilarious.
- Peggy doesn’t have her own secretary but she pretends that she has one during the phone call with Father.
- Petra, who is Crab Colson’s wife, is obsessed with drinking. She even hits the door while walking to the dinner table. I mean can she not see the door?