

Romance Through Time

Like a plain caterpillar undergoing metamorphosis to change into a beautiful butterfly, genres in film across time have adapted to new technology, trends, and current events, resulting in more complex interpretations and interwoven ideas in films. Simply put, change is inevitable. *The Clock* was released in 1945 by Vincente Minnelli during World War 2, a period of great distress and anxiety for many. Contrastingly, *Hiroshima mon Amour* was released in 1959, after the end of the war and at a time when the world was recovering and healing. Both films are characterized by the same genre, but romance is shown in such different perspectives, reflecting how their genre changes according to the ever-changing culture. The romance in *The Clock* acts as a distraction from the heavy issue of the world war, but the romance in *Hiroshima mon Amour* is presented in a way that is almost urging the audience to remember the pains of the war. Both films, although holding strikingly different purposes and messages, attempted to address a prominent issue at their time and reflect the evolution of the Melodrama Romance genre. In the Classical period, Romance films were simple, but in the Post-Classical period, Romance films grew to be more nuanced, adopting deeper meanings and changing due to current events.

Some characteristics of Melodrama films have stayed consistent, but the execution of them differs from the Classical to Post-Classical periods. In lecture, it was taught that one characteristic of Melodramas is “subjectivity exaggeration” to want the audience to “feel for the characters” and “replicate their emotions”. In *The Clock*, Director Minnelli’s purpose is to give his audience a break from the reality of the world war, and he achieves this through Joe and Alice’s carefree relationship. Their relationship moves fast and the physicality of the actors is innocent, such as when Alice stretches her legs out while sitting next to Joe on a sculpture at the Metropolitan. Their gentleness with one another and their interactions convey a picture of purity. Furthermore, conflict is absent. Restraints on Alice’s end may be seen as a conflict, but these are short: Alice picks up the phone and answers Freddy but in the next scene is seen rushing to meet up with Joe, they fight over Freddy but immediately reconcile when Joe says her eyes are brown, they separate in the train station but shortly find each other. Minnelli wants the audience to feel the love between Joe and Alice in a carefree way and know that this positive emotion can exist in the face of overwhelming negativity. As Joe McElhaney puts it in his article about Minnelli, “cinema consecrated to beautiful but ultimately decorative and false images”. However, in *Hiroshima mon Amour* the romance between the two actors is strained and Director Resnais wants to remind his audience of what pain the war brought. He wants the audience to feel the lingering sorrow and fear that people impacted by the war feel. “Don’t forget” he seems to say, through the raw and sensual physicality of the actors. Every interaction between the man and woman is desperate as if both believe it is the last time they will be able to touch their lover. This belief that their love is temporary is because of past painful experiences. The man holds remnants of the memory of the Hiroshima bombing destroying his family and country, and the woman of her lover killed in a war, which leaves them both anticipating suffering. This lingering pain prevents the two from fully connecting throughout the entire movie. Newspaper writer Richard Brody describes Resnais’ films as “[probing] the deep connection of intimate and political life”. Unlike in *The Clock*, the conflict occurs throughout the film and stresses the audience out. Resnais attempts to convey the feelings of sorrow and pain through this almost cursed romance.

In the fourteen years between the release of *The Clock* and *Hiroshima mon Amour*, many developments were made in the film industry. Catherine Constable in her book *Postmodernism and Film* describes classical films as “[taking] the form of logical chains of cause and effect that are predominately character-centered”. She goes on further to describe classical films as having “two main lines of action”, which she states are heterosexual romance and a goal for the character. Classical films are simple. *The Clock* shows events in temporal order, has two main

characters, and small problems that only concern the relationship between the two characters. On the other hand, *Hiroshima mon Amour* is more complicated. *Hiroshima mon Amour* contains flashbacks, has two main characters and many sub-characters, and introduces problems other than romance-related ones. As we learned in class, the Post-Classical period brought genre experimentation, such as hybridization. We can see hybridization in *Hiroshima mon Amour*, a romance film about more than just love. Resnais meditates on time and memory, and how powerful they are. He combines Romance with War and Drama. Furthermore, we see genre as a vehicle—Resnais attempts to address the serious issue of the side effects of World War 2 and how important it is never to forget. He shows this in the beginning conversation between the man and woman. The juxtaposition between the images of the aftermath of the bombing and people in pain and enchanting, relaxing dialogue and the tender touch between the man and woman, is shocking. The audience is forced to remember the tragedy.

The romance is easy and innocent in *The Clock* but hard and erotic in *Hiroshima mon Amour*, and this is a reflection of current events. In 1934 the Motion Picture Production Code was enforced, setting film industry articles about romance and how it can be portrayed in movies. This may explain the lack of physical touch and sensuality between Joe and Alice in *The Clock*, and why their love was portrayed as more tame and innocent. The gradual removal of it occurred during the release of *Hiroshima mon Amour*, and this may explain why the two main characters interact in a way more sensual manner. An article by NYTimes describes *The Clock* as having a “lightly sentimental touch...[leaving] one with a warm feeling toward his fellow-man, especially toward the young folks who today are trying to crowd a lifetime of happiness into a few fleeting hours”, and this is exactly the kind of feeling Minnelli was aiming for. As stated earlier, *The Clock* was released amid World War 2, and many fliers, songs, and movies were intended to boost morale and inspire positivity. Gillian Beer describes romance-centered mediums as “entirely [dependent] on the narrator or the romance” as he “remakes the rules of what is possible”, which means that “Our enjoyment depends upon our willing surrender to his power...The absurdities of romance are felt when we refuse to inhabit the world offered us and disengaged ourselves, bringing to bear our own opinions.” This gives directors immense power in what kinds of emotions they evoke in their watchers. Minnelli chooses to create genuine feelings of love and joy in *The Clock*. That is the purpose of Romance in the 1945 film. Adversely, an NYTimes article in 1960 describes *Hiroshima mon Amour* as “a patent plea for peace and the abolition of atomic warfare; as a poetic evocation of love lost and momentarily found”. Romance in *Hiroshima mon Amour* is difficult, as the man and woman grapple between being together or being apart. The woman constantly runs away from the man, saying no every time he asks to see her again, but the man fights for her. Romance is represented in a more fragile way. The characters need to fight for their love. However, the obstacles they face make their love more passionate and meaningful. At the beginning and end of the movie, the lady has a monologue where she expresses how she feels about the love between them, saying “You’re destroying me. You’re good for me.” It is a love that is albeit destructive, addicting. Denis de Rougemont describes this kind of tragic love perfectly in his book *Passion and Society*. This love, he says, embodies a passion that “lacerates [man] and [one in] which all his common sense rejects”, and although unhealthy it represents “the repressed longing for death, for self-experience to the utmost, for the revealing shock” and a “secret preference for what is unhappy”. *Hiroshima mon Amour* showcases a romance that Rougement would describe as a “tale of impossible love”, ending on an ambiguous note. Why does Resnais illustrate romance in this way? It is because, as again Rougement states, “suffering and understanding are deeply connected” and “love delayed in its happy fulfillment by some obstruction” is the best kind of love that in the end is satisfying and worth it. The roughened romance in *Hiroshima mon Amour* connects people from all over the world. Although the woman cannot quite understand the pain of the bombing to the extent of the man, she can suffer with him in a similar way that connects them, and in the same sense, the people outside of Hiroshima should try to empathize with the victims that are directly impacted by the tragedy. Romance, in this movie, is used differently: to convey the message that World War 2 should not be forgotten as lasting memories of pain and fear for victims will never go away, and so humanism in the post-war existentialist world is important. For this complex message to be conveyed, romance is utilized in a way different from *The Clock*.

Minnelli and Resnais existed in such differing film industries which accounts for differences in interpretations and utilizations of romance in their films. The film culture during Minnelli was conservative, and Minnelli's films are symptomatic of this. This change in the industry occurred as traditional business leaders and politicians gained power in World War 2 and post-war periods. Many films were absent of political messages to avoid punishment from powerful movie industry moguls. The Hollywood blacklist is a list of media workers deemed ineligible for employment because of "subversive ties", generated by many Hollywood studios. Initiatives like this might have prevented directors, like Minnelli, from creating films that contained messages about politics and serious issues. The Hollywood blacklist was slowly discontinued in the years leading up to the early 1960s, and this freedom might account for the incorporation of political messages in *Hiroshima mon Amour*.

As previously stated, the genre of Melodrama Romance has changed from the Classical to Post-Classical eras due to current events and changes in the film industries. The world during the release of *The Clock* was chaotic and the director created the film to distract from this turmoil. Furthermore, restrictions in the music industry, like the Motion Picture Production Code and the Hollywood blacklist, forces directors to represent romance more innocently and to comply with the wishes of the industry elites. The world had settled down by the time *Hiroshima mon Amour* was released, and Resnais saw this as a bad thing. His film uses romance to depict the message that pain from war is everlasting and should not be forgotten. Both directors do a beautiful job of painting the romance between two individuals, but in ways that reflect the ever-changing culture.

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