

Roman Holiday Film Summary

Roman Holiday by William Wyler

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Contents

Roman Holiday Film Summary.....	1
Contents.....	2
Context.....	3
Summary and Analysis.....	5
Characters.....	9
Themes.....	12
Style and Cinematography.....	14
Motifs.....	15
Symbols.....	17
Essay Questions.....	19

Context

Gregory Peck and Audrey Hepburn perform in this delightful comedy in which Princess Ann of a country unnamed runs away from the Embassy in Rome in search of some much-needed freedom. Since her doctor gives her a sleeping pill, Anne ends up falling asleep on a bench on the side of the road.

Gregory Peck, who plays Joe, finds Ann and takes her to his home when he cannot find where she lives. The next morning he realizes that he is host to the famous Princess Ann and decides to cash in on the story. He calls his photographer, Irving and the two take Ann around town to show her all the sights while photographing her.

Joe discovers one unexpected problem—he falls for Ann. Once he falls for her, he realizes that he can't sell the story. Instead, he tells Irving to sell the pictures if he wishes, but that he's out. Eventually, though, Ann decides to return to do her duty to her family and her country, but she will always have the love and freedom she found on her "Roman Holiday".

Before *Roman Holiday*, William Wyler had directed dozens of films including *Mrs. Miniver* (1942), *The Memphis Belle: Story of a Flying Fortress* (1944) and *The Best Years of Our Lives* (1946). Wyler had a classy touch and all of his films are extremely entertaining. He also went on to direct *The Children's Hour* (1961), *How to Steal a Million* (1966) and *Funny Girl* (1968).

Gregory Peck became a star when he appeared in *The Keys of the Kingdom* (1944), for which he received an Oscar nomination. He also appeared in Alfred Hitchcock's *Spellbound* (1945), *The Yearling* (1946), *Gentleman's Agreement* (1947) and *Twelve O'Clock High* (1949). Peck had a long and dazzling career, but *Roman Holiday* is one of his most fun and lovable movies.

Audrey Hepburn debuted in *Roman Holiday* and won an Oscar for her prize. She quickly skyrocketed to stardom with her subsequent films such as *Funny Face* (1957), *Sabrina* (1957), *Breakfast at Tiffany's* (1961) and *My Fair Lady* (1964). Her great acting skills and beautiful features have made her one of the most popular actresses of all time.

Eddie Albert who plays Irving Radovich has performed in over 100 movies during his long career. He debuted in *Brother Rat* (1938) and later appeared in *Four Wives* (1939), *A Dispatch from Reuters* (1940) and *The Wagons Roll at Night* (1941). He became well-known for his role in the television show, *Green Acres*.

Roman Holiday was nominated for ten awards, but only won three. The nominations include Best Actor in a Supporting Role for Eddie Albert; Best Art Direction-Set Decoration, Black-and-White for Hal Pereira and Walter H. Tyler; Best Cinematography, Black-and-White for Franz Planer and Henri Alekan; Best Director for William Wyler; Best Film Editing for Robert Swink; Best Picture for William Wyler; and Best Writing,



Screenplay for Ian McLellan Hunter and John Dighton. The film won three Oscars for: Best Actress in a Leading Role for Audrey Hepburn; Best Costume Design, Black-and-White for Edith Head; and Best Writing, Motion Picture Story for Ian McLellan Hunter and Dalton Trumbo.



Summary and Analysis

Roman Holiday begins with news reports of Princess Ann's arrivals in countries all over Europe. She waves to adoring fans, opens buildings, makes government deals and watches parades. Finally, she arrives in Italy where she attends a ball held in her honor. Late that night, she tells her maid that she hates her clothes, including all of her nightclothes. When the window is opened, Princess Ann hears music, leaps out of bed and looks outside to see people dancing. She is sent back to bed, where she and the maid go over the next day's schedule.

Finally, Ann begins weeping and screaming, "Stop!" The maid tells her she'll call the doctor, but she refuses his services, saying she'll be dead before he arrives. When he does arrive, she pretends to be asleep. She once again goes into hysterics and he gives her a shot. She asks if she can keep the light on for a while and he says the best thing he knows is to do exactly as she wishes for a while.

Ann lies in bed for a bit, but then goes to the window to watch the people outside dancing and having a good time. She gets dressed and sneaks out of the building. Once outside, she climbs on the back of a truck and hides behind some crates so that she can get out through the gate. After she's made it out, she sneaks off the cart and begins wandering through the streets.

In the upstairs room of a building she passes, several men sit and play poker. One of them is reporter Joe Bradley. Another of the men says that he has to get up early the next morning to meet with Princess Ann. When Joe has lost some more money, he decides that it is time to go home. On his way, he passes Ann who has fallen asleep on a bench and is talking in her sleep. He tries to wake her up so that she doesn't get picked up by the police.

Joe tells Ann that people who can't handle their liquor shouldn't drink and asks how such a classy woman has ended up sleeping on the street. Then he hails a taxi for himself and tells her to get some coffee. However, since she has just fallen asleep again, he decides to give her the cab. He helps her into the taxi and asks her where she lives. She can't answer, so he decides to go home. Because Ann has no money, he gives the driver extra money and tells him to take her wherever she wants to go. However, the man doesn't want her either. Finally, Joe takes her to his apartment.

Upstairs at Joe's apartment, Ann asks for a silk nightgown with rosebuds, but Joe gives her his pajamas instead. She asks him to help her undress, but he simply takes off the tie around her neck. After fixing the couch as a bed for her, he decides to go out for coffee. That same night, the news of Ann's disappearance is told to the royal family although they decide to keep it a secret from the public. Joe returns home to find Ann asleep in his bed rather than on the couch. He slams the door and makes a lot of noise, but she doesn't even flinch. Finally, he moves the couch next to the bed and rolls her off onto it.



The next morning wires are being sent about the sudden illness of Princess Ann. Both Joe and Ann wake up late and Joe hurries to try to keep his interview with the princess. When he arrives at work, however, he is interrogated by his editor who begins asking him many questions after Joe lies about getting the interview. The editor then tells him that the princess is ill and shows him the newspaper report.

Joe is shocked when he sees the picture of the princess and realizes that she is sleeping in his apartment. He rushes to call his landlord to make sure that Ann is still asleep in bed. Joe tells him to keep people out of the room and to keep her inside. He then goes to his editor and asks how much the interview would pay. The editor tells him that it would be worth two hundred-fifty to five hundred dollars. With pictures, he says it would be worth five thousand dollars. The editor also makes a side bet of five hundred dollars that Joe won't land the interview.

Joe tries to convince his landlord, Giovanni, to lend him some cash, but he refuses. Back in the room, Ann is still soundly asleep. Joe compares her face to the picture of the princess and addresses her as "Her Royal Highness", to which she sleepily answers. He moves her from the couch to the bed as police sirens go off, probably amidst the search for Princess Ann. Ann tells him of a dream that was actually the events of the night before. She sees Joe and realizes that it wasn't a dream. Ann is suspicious of the situation and asks for the details. She begins to laugh, realizes she's free and introduces herself as Anya. She is shocked to learn the time and wants to hurry to leave. He reassures her that she's been no trouble and runs a bath for her.

While Ann is in the bathroom, he calls his friend Irving, a photographer. He tells Irving to come over immediately. In Joe's apartment, Giovanni's wife finds Ann and lectures her, but Ann understands nothing she says. Joe finds the door to his room open and finds Ann outside. Ann tells him it must be fun to live in such a place. He offers to take her to lunch or wherever she is going, but she refuses his help. However, she returns to borrow some money that she intends to send back to him.

Joe follows Ann at a distance as she wanders through the streets of Rome. He watches as she buys new shoes and gets a drastic haircut even though the hairdresser is not happy about cutting off her beautiful hair. While Joe waits to use a payphone, he asks a little girl to let him borrow her camera, but the girl's teacher sends her away. Meanwhile, the barber asks Ann to go dancing with him that night and gives her the address. She buys ice cream and a man tries to sell her flowers; however, he does give her one for free. Joe just "happens" to run into Ann later in the street. She tells him that she ran away from school the night before, but she now feels like she should go back.

Joe convinces Ann to take the day off for herself and he offers to accompany her. She orders champagne at lunch and tells him that the last time she drank some was for her father's fortieth anniversary of when he got his job. Just as Irving joins them, Joe tells her that he himself sells fertilizer. Every time Irving attempts to reveal Joe's true job, Joe spills water or tips over the chair on him. Finally, Irving becomes angry and tries to leave. Joe finally pulls Irving aside and explains the situation. Outside, Ann has her first



cigarette and Irving takes a photograph with his lighter/camera. Later that day, detectives arrive to search for Ann.

The three friends go to the Coliseum and wander past all of the important sites of Rome. Later, Ann accidentally drives off on a moped, but Joe is able to help her drive so that she only destroys a few shops. The three are eventually arrested and sent to court. Joe's American News Service badge helps them get out for free. Joe also tells the court that they were on their way to get married.

They then visit the "Mouth of Truth," a stone wall with a hole for the mouth that is reported to bite off your hand if you lie. Joe puts his hand in and begins screaming and Ann laughs when she realizes the joke that's been played on her. Along one wall, there are thousands of inscriptions from granted wishes. Irving leaves to develop the pictures and the Joe and Ann take a carriage ride before they all go dancing on the barges later that night.

At the barges, detectives are watching and spot Ann. She thanks Joe for spending the whole day doing the things she wanted to do and admits that she has never met anyone so kind and unselfish. They run into the barber and Joe is glad to get an introduction. Then, Irving arrives to take a few more pictures. As more detectives arrive on the scene, one dances with Ann. Joe tries to save her and the two of them fight with the men. Ann even breaks a guitar over the head of one of them. They try to escape the police by jumping into the water. Finally, they swim ashore and as they laugh together, Joe kisses her. Then, they return to Joe's apartment to dry off their clothes.

In the apartment, Joe and Ann hear a news flash that Ann's people are concerned for her well-being. Ann talks about what a wonderful cook she is, but tells him she never has the chance to use her skills. He says he will have to move to a place with a kitchen. She says that she has to go and they embrace. Joe finally drives her back to the embassy. They embrace passionately in the car, but she finally leaves to return to her life.

Ann refuses to give the details of her day to her people. She tells them that were she not aware of her duties to family and country, she would never have returned. She dismisses them, sending everyone away. In his apartment, Joe hears a knock and hopes it is Ann. Instead, it is his editor who has showed up to find out if he got the story. Irving dashes into the apartment with the pictures and tries to show them to the editor, but Joe stops him. Joe tells the editor that he couldn't get the interview and the editor leaves after telling Joe to go to the press conference the next morning.

Joe explains to Irving that he doesn't want to do the story. They do take a look at the pictures, however. They talk about how the article would be set up, but Joe doesn't want to sell the story. Then, the two prepare for the press conference with the princess.

At the interview, Joe and Irving are sure to find their way to the front of the crowd where Ann spots them quickly. The press begins to question the princess and she gives very diplomatic answers. She says at one point that her faith in relationships between



nations is the same as her faith between people. Joe says that on behalf of his press service her faith will be upheld. Another asks what her favorite place was and though she begins to give a diplomatic answer, she finally says, "Rome. I will cherish my time here as long as I live."

Both Ann and Joe have tears in their eyes and she is shocked to see Irving take a picture of her with his lighter. In an unprecedented move, she goes to meet some of the ladies and gentlemen of the press. She walks down the row toward Joe and Irving. Irving presents Ann with some photographs of her trip. She and Joe meet, but the further she gets from him, the sadder she looks. Finally, she returns to the stage and with tears in her eyes, smiles at the press, especially Joe whose eyes are also welling up with. While the rest of the press leaves, Joe stands alone and stares longingly at where the princess exited. He then walks slowly out of the long room, their wonderful time in Rome over forever.



Characters

Joe Bradley, played by Gregory Peck

Description

Joe Bradley is a newspaper reporter living in Rome. He is in debt to his editor and he hopes to use the Princess Ann story to get him out of debt. On the way to getting the story, however, Joe begins to fall in love with her.

Analysis

Joe is an irresponsible man who drives his editor crazy. However, when he finds a great story, he jumps on it. The only problem is that as he spends time with the princess he begins to fall in love with her. When he recognizes his feelings, Joe decides not to sell the story so that he can protect both her and himself. As he walks out of the final press conference, Joe is happy for his experiences, but distressed about his lost love.

Princess Ann - 'Anya Smith', played by Audrey Hepburn

Description

Princess Ann is the princess of an unnamed country, for which she speaks on behalf of while being whisked around Europe. Ann enjoys her position but yearns to be free even if it's only for a day. One night, she becomes sick and tired of her predicament and runs away.

Because the doctor gave her drugs earlier, Ann falls asleep on a bench alongside the road. Joe finds her and takes her home. Believing Joe doesn't know her identity, Ann spends the rest of the day with him and before it is over, she falls in love with him. However, she finally returns to her duty for her country.

Analysis

Ann is a young girl who simply wants a little freedom. She runs away from home so that she can experience what normal people do on a daily basis. Ann is naïve and doesn't realize that Joe knows who she is or that he and Irving work for the newspaper. She spends the whole day enjoying her "holiday" in Rome.

As the day ends, though, Ann realizes that she must return to the embassy and her duty for her country. She sacrifices her love for Joe for her love for her country. However, she



does get to say goodbye to him the next morning when he shows up as a reporter at the press conference. After saying goodbye, she returns to her life as royalty.

Irving Radovich, played by Eddie Albert

Description

Irving is a photographer and one of Joe's best friends. Joe calls Irving when he realizes that it is the princess who is sleeping on his couch. Irving follows the two around all day, snapping pictures of the princess with his lighter camera. Irving is excited about the money they will make off the story and is initially angry with Joe when he decides not to sell it. However, he eventually understands Joe's reasoning and he returns the pictures to the princess.

Analysis

Irving is mainly focused on the money he will make from the story, but he ends up liking the princess for her company in the end. Irving finally agrees to simply give her the pictures after he understands the extent of Joe's feelings.

Mr. Hennessy, Editor, played by Hartley Power

Description

Mr. Hennessy controls Joe to a large extent because of Joe's gambling debts. Hennessy is excited to hear about Joe's possible story, but he is very angry when he discovers that Joe has decided not sell it.

Analysis

Mr. Hennessy is a typical newspaperman who is interested in increasing circulation. He is often angry with the irresponsible Joe, but he wants the story on Princess Ann's disappearance.

Ambassador, played by Harcourt Williams

Description

The Ambassador helps watch over Ann while she is in Rome and he orchestrates a quiet search for her when she goes missing.



Analysis

The Ambassador is a smart man who keeps the truth about Ann's disappearance hidden behind the story of her illness.

Countess Vereberg, played by Margaret Rawlings

Description

The Countess helps Ann get ready and sets her schedule. She is solely in charge of Ann and she is terrified when the princess disappears.

Analysis

The Countess is a kind woman, but she does not understand how trapped Ann feels by her position.

Hairdresser Mario Delani, played by Paolo Carlini

Description

Mario is one of the first people Ann meets on her day out. She decides to get her hair cut so that she will look different. Mario invites her out on a date and she ends up seeing him later that night on the barge.

Analysis

Mario is love-struck when he meets Ann and he wants to see her again.

Giovanni, landlord, played by Claudio Ermelli

Description

Giovanni is the landlord at Joe's building. Giovanni agrees to guard Joe's apartment while the princess is there.

Analysis

Giovanni and Joe have some humorous exchanges that bring a certain fun and light-hearted feeling to the film.

Themes

Importance of Freedom

Above all else, Princess Ann runs away to seek freedom. Throughout her life, Ann has been kept away from the normal world as she has been surrounded by the royal family and soldiers. She cannot even imagine a normal day where she could walk along the street alone eating ice cream, or meet a man in a shop and go dancing with him at night.

The first night in Rome, Ann watches the couples dancing on the barge and realizes that she is missing out on the best things life offers. She throws a fit to try to convince the Countess that she needs her freedom, but her plan backfires when the doctor arrives and simply gives her drugs to calm her down. Many of the people helping her do not realize that she has missed all of the normal things that they have experienced in their lives—they do not realize the precious possession of their freedom.

Freedom is a concept that so many people neglect to consider. Once you have it, freedom does not seem to be of such great importance. However, to people such as Ann or people in war-torn countries, true freedom is a precious commodity. Ann realizes this and sets out on her own to grant herself at least one day of freedom.

Challenges of Royalty

We dream of being famous and we dream of being royalty. Every little girl wants to be a princess and everyone believes that fame and riches will somehow magically make life easier. In *Roman Holiday*, we see that royalty is not all it's cracked up to be. Although Ann has pretty dresses and people to serve her, she is still unhappy.

One of the greatest challenges Ann faces is the lack of freedom in her life. Ann's entire life is based on work more than enjoyment. She speaks on behalf of her country, makes public appearances and parades through towns. However, she has no time after she finishes her job to simply enjoy her life.

Ann finally arrives at a point where she must get away from the challenges in her life for at least a day. She runs away from the embassy, meets new people and finds that life outside can be wonderful too. However, she eventually realizes that her job and her duty still remain and so she returns to her post as a representative of the family and the country she loves.

Making Choices

One of the most difficult aspects of life is having to make choices. We must choose what to wear, what to eat, where to live and how to act. However, our choices of how to act

and what to do are the most important and sometimes the most painful choices we make.

Ann chooses to leave the embassy so that she can experience real life. After spending an entire day doing whatever she pleases and having fun for the first time in her life, Ann has to make a difficult choice. She has to leave Joe, with whom she has fallen in love, so that she can return to serve her family and her country. As she walks away from Joe's car, Ann makes the most difficult decision of her young life.

Joe also has to make choices. He is at first only interested in Ann as a great story that will bring him a lot of money. Once he gets to know her, though, he falls in love with her and must choose whether love or money will take precedence. Ultimately, he ends up choosing love and does not print the story about Ann. He also encourages Irving not to print the pictures and thus Irving makes the difficult choice to also forego a lot of money to protect Ann.

Making choices is difficult, but we can learn from characters in films. In this film, we see that making the right choices is based on money or fame, but simply on what is right and what is wrong.

Style and Cinematography

Roman Holiday is a strictly entertaining film. As a romantic comedy, it is flawless and completely enjoyable. Audrey Hepburn and Gregory Peck made a perfect Hollywood pair for this film. The original director had hoped to cast Cary Grant and Elizabeth Taylor in the roles, but the latter director decided to take a different route by casting Gregory Peck, who was looking for a great comedy role at the time and the relatively unknown Audrey Hepburn.

The style of the film is innocent and honest. Although the entire film is based on the escape of Princess Ann and the deceit in which both she and Joe engage, there is a certain honesty to this film. Hepburn brings a positive and innocent presence to both Princess Ann and the film as a whole. What could be seen as a spoiled girl running away from a charmed life instead comes across as understandable and accurate. Because of Hepburn's brilliant performance, the viewer sides with Princess Ann and understands her desire to run away from her sheltered life even if just for a moment. The viewer also understands, however, her need to return to her duties as a princess and representative of her country.

The film not only shows a princess running away from her royal life for a day, but it also introduces Rome to the viewers. Many people at the time had not visited Europe or many places, so the film allowed viewers to experience Rome through the eyes of the naïve Princess Ann. Viewers loved being able to see Rome through her fresh eyes just as they would have had they been able to go themselves. This was a brilliant move on the part of the studio as viewers were fascinated with other countries and were able to experience an amazing adventure through the film.



Motifs

Escape

Throughout *Roman Holiday* we experience the motif of escape. Every event in the film hinges on the fact that Princess Ann decides to run away from the embassy. Having spent weeks traveling, Ann is sick of her life and she simply wants to go out and enjoy herself like a normal person.

When Ann escapes from the Embassy, she is escaping from her life as well. She is trying to escape from her duty, her family and her caretakers. She wants to dance on a barge all night long and eat ice cream on the side of the street instead of spending her days as a diplomat and representative for her family.

Ann's escape is the catalyst for the story, since without her escape, she could never have met Joe or had any of her unique experiences. It also helps reveal the themes in the film as she searches for her freedom and then makes the difficult choice to return to the embassy and her life, leaving Joe behind forever.

Duty

Duty versus freedom. This is a hard balance to find. Duty to family, friends and country can be extremely difficult when it goes against your own desires. Princess Ann discovers this as she runs around town with Joe and Irving. Ann ends up loving life outside the palace walls and begins to fall in love with Joe as well.

However, Ann's duty presides just in the background of her experience. As we continue to hear about her supposed illness, we realize that eventually Ann will have to make a decision regarding her future. Finally, she chooses to return home after being discovered by the police.

Ann recognizes her duty to her country. This decision helps to close the story by giving her a reason to return and a reason for her romance with Joe to end. Duty is a difficult concept and this motif helps viewers to understand this runaway princess-both why she left and why she returned.

Risky Romance

No film would be complete without some kind of romantic occurrence. The risky whirlwind romance between Ann and Joe helps move the story along. Once they meet, the audience begins to wonder how a relationship between a princess and a newspaperman will turn out.



In her whole cloistered life, Ann has never had the chance for romance, but once she is free from duty everything becomes a possibility. In order for this runaway princess to truly experience life in Rome, she must meet someone who can show her a good time. Joe fits this bill perfectly.

In addition to helping the story move, the risky romance also makes Ann human. She might seem like a spoiled brat for running away from such a life, but as we see her learning about normal, everyday things and being amazed, we begin to sympathize with her. Thus, when she returns to do her duty and leaves Joe behind, our heartstrings are tugged even more.



Symbols

Photographs

Throughout the film, Irving is constantly taking pictures of Princess Ann without her knowledge. He and Joe plan to sell the story and the pictures to the newspaper so that they can pay off their debts and enjoy the good life. The pictures are all of Princess Ann's experiences as she travels around Rome.

At the end of the film, Joe and Irving choose not to sell the story because of Joe's feelings for Ann. So, Irving takes the pictures and gives them to Ann at the press conference. Until this point, Ann has no idea that they are reporters, so she is pleased to receive the pictures back without damage to her reputation.

The photographs symbolize Ann's day of freedom. Her freedom is forever captured in the photographs and she can return to her normal life with a piece of her freedom still in hand. In a life with a lot of duty but little joy, Ann will be able to look back on these photographs for years and remember the joy she experienced during her "Roman Holiday."

The Dance

Ann's greatest wish comes true as she dances on the barge. The first night she reaches Rome, she looks down from her room and sees the people dancing. She wishes that she could have the type of life that they are so enjoying.

Once Ann escapes from the Embassy, she begins to wander about Rome. Joe finds her sleeping on a park bench and from that point, she begins to spend her time enjoying Rome by his side. Although Ann gets a haircut and eats ice cream, she still wishes to go to the dance on the barge. Luckily, she meets a young hairdresser named Mario who invites her there that night.

Joe and Ann decide to go dancing on the barge so that she can have that experience. It is here that her time of freedom begins to come to a rapid close. The detectives have finally found her, but Ann still has time to enjoy the dancing and experience the thrill of being chased. After all the time of being ordered around by such detectives, Ann finally gets the chance to knock one of them over the head with a guitar.

The Mouth of Truth

During their travels about Rome, Joe shows Ann the "Mouth of Truth." This stone carving in the wall is said to bite off the hand of a liar. As they look at it and talk about the carving, Joe tries to convince Ann to put her hand inside its mouth. She refuses, however, for fear that the superstition might be true.



The Mouth of Truth symbolizes the difficulty of honesty. Ann wants to tell Joe the truth, but she realizes that it could be dangerous for both of them if he knew. At the same time, he cannot tell her the truth about his career lest she run away. Then, he would lose both his story and his girl. One of the funniest moments is when Joe puts his hand in and then pretends that it has been eaten. Ann is shocked, but she simply laughs when she realizes the joke is on her.

After they visit the Mouth of Truth, the truth eventually begins to unravel. After their time at the barge, it is obvious that Ann is pretending to be someone she's not, but she doesn't know Joe's real identity until the press conference the next morning. The truth is complicated, but the suspension of truth for that one day gave Ann the most wonderful day of freedom she had ever known.



Essay Questions

Why does Princess Ann decide to run away?

How does Princess Ann end up sleeping on a bench on the side of the street?

How does the royal family cover up Ann's disappearance?

Why does Joe take Ann in?

What does Joe decide to do when he realizes Ann's identity?

Who does Joe call to help him?

Why did viewers enjoy the scenes in Rome?

Throughout their time together, how do Joe and Ann's feelings for one another change?

Why does Joe decide not to sell the story?

Why does Ann finally return to her position as royalty?