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Movie Review: FIVE EASY PIECES

FIVE EASY PIECES is the story of a young man adrift alone in a world of inferiors: moral, spiritual and cultural. Our hero is a concert pianist from a long line of musical geniuses now working an oil rig somewhere down South. The "five easy pieces", I'm told, refer to the easy songs a beginner at the piano learns first.

But these "pieces" could just as well be the five women Bobby (that's the boy himself) puts solidly down in the course of the picture: three, directly with a good fucking, and all five with his masterly wit. Two of these women are waitresses (everyone knows waitresses have been ruling this society too long); another is a curly giggly fluff he meets at a bowling alley; a fourth is an "intellectual woman" (aren't they just awful that type?); and finally there is a young dedicated artist, who almost manages to come up to Bobby's level - but not quite. I guess this movie is a kind of Odyssey - a long trip from nowhere to nowhere - in which women mainly serve as quideposts to all that is rotten, empty, stupid, rigid, flimsy, and of course, phony, in this man's world.

Easy piece number one is a slim, pretty waitress named Rae. In the very first scene Bobby knocks her musical ability in the name of artistic integrity. In the second scene he assails her bowling skills in the name of physical dexterity. He treats her like shit, and when she complains she's being treated like shit, and what will people think of her, he comforts her that they'll all say she's such a good woman 'cause she takes so much from such a bastard. (Although Bobby had shown a keen interest previously in keeping up the standards in both music and sports, he does not seem to worry that such an explanation to Rae might be an appeal to quite a low level of human dignity. Would such an explanation serve just as well for him if, say, Rae had treated him like shit in public?)

Now Betty, the bit of fluff he picks up at the bowling alley (while Rae is outside agonizing over her low score and shitty reputation) is passed off as merely ridiculous. Later in a bedroom somewhere she tells a childish story in a childish voice about how she came to have a cleft in her chin. (I'll tell you - When she was just made and the clay not set yet, God disapproving pushed her away with his finger) Another couple is present during the narration which is followed by embarrassed silence. Bobby rescues Betty from this consequence of her own inanity via the deft substitution for conversation of something for which she is better equipped, namely, sex. In an ensuing sex scene Betty unashamedly oohs and aahs it up all over the place, while Bobby is discovered scarcely breathing heavy. This boy is on top of things in more ways than one.

One swipe at a male combines sexism and class bias at once. Bobby has a buddy who works with him on the oil rig - only this fellow is not taking time out from artistic pursuits; this is simply the work he can get. Well Buddy tells Bobby that he (Bobby) has gotten Rae pregnant, assuming Bobby will do the "decent thing" (In what is called lower-middle class morality, if a guy's been going with a girl and knocks her up, his friends do expect him to marry her. It doesn't always happen, but the pressure's

there) Bobby then does his nonconformist, free-spirit act. He will not be pinned down, domesticated by the fact of Rae's pregnancy. He will not be taken in by talk of the "good life". His friend is just a "cracker" anyway. What could he know of the demands of the spirit, the call of the wild, or what-have-you!

Buddy, however, perseveres. In a domestic, night-in-front-of-the-TV scene at Buddy's, Buddy plants his own little boy on Bobby's knees. He tells Bobby he ought to "get one and try it". Bobby, baby bouncing baby-fashion on his lap, replies, addressing baby: "Crush that one and I won't get any". I didn't know those things were so tender, did you? Well, well.

There's an interesting scene with Bobby and Buddy on their way to work. They're riding along in Bobby's car swilling whiskey when they run into a traffic jam. Bobby gets out of the car and steps onto a car bumper here and there to find out how the situation looks up ahead. He doesn't have much luck this way so he finally jumps on the back of a truck. Well, on this truck, see, is a piano. Bobby satisfies himself about the traffic and then sits down to play. What a funny bit. Horns going, commuters complaining and Bobby up there playing Bach or something. Finally the truck starts up, turns in the wrong direction and carries Bobby off playing into the fade-out. But that's what I really love about upper-class refugees, you think they're just one of the people (one of the guys) and then all of a sudden they'll sneak up on you with their "accomplishments!" And what about the truck-driver transporting the piano? Presumably he is responsible for this piano. Does he growl: "Hey what the hell ya doin'. You break that piano and I'll break yer ass"? No, he is conveniently still. Not a word during the performance.

In a scene with his sister at a recording session of her's (she's a pianist too) Bobby is a nice boy, for a change. Though you know right away who is the greater though less-realized genius of the two, Bobby doesn't feel the need to make his superiority explicit with one of his clever put-downs. But that's alright. The studio technicians do a good job on her. (e.g. "I played better when I was three") So business goes on as usual.

Anyway, sister reveals that Daddy is ill - two strokes - and he really deserves to see his boy again before he passes on to that big stag affair in the sky. Bobby decides to do his duty. After an attempt at coolly dumping Rae, Bobby's conscience nags him into letting her tag along, provided she secludes herself a discreet distance from Daddy's house, or rather, Daddy's estate,

On the road Bobby and Rae pick up two women. One of them is a tough (neurotic?) dyke, who is apparently compelled to spill out her guts over the state of the world. She gets on Rae's nerves and vice versa. The two of them get into ranking each other out. Bobby calmly savors this display of division in the female camp awhile. But when they both begin to get on his nerves, he, as lord of the manor (owner of the car) exercises his right of supreme arbiter therein, and terminates this petty dissension with a fatherly: "Shut up!"

Getting back to the state of the world: The heart of this woman's concern and the topic of her continuous monologue is "Man and Filth-Their Interrelation": How repulsive Man is, how He pollutes all He touches,

how He generates crap and ugliness everywhere: "It's not the dirt - It's the filth". Of course, Bobby is amused at this kind of alienation (It's apparently not on a par with his own) and levels her with an easy joke. Audience loves it. But the interesting thing really is the phenomenally clear head this woman has concerning men - I mean Man.

Stopping off at a roadside diner on the way, who should they bump into but the ESTABLISHMENT - in the person of a crudely made-up, middle-aged waitress. (Aren't they just the worse kind, though) This 'menopausal' creature refuses, do you hear, refuses to give Bobby tomatoes when the menu calls for potatoes ("no substitutions"), neither will she fork over a sideorder of toast ("no sideorders of toast!"). Rules, rules, rules, rules. That's the Establishment alright. Does Bobby flinch in the face of such naked power? No. He takes her on with his brilliant mind. He disposes of her with his nimble wit. When she finally orders him out, he wipes his big brawny arm across the table knocking the 4 glasses of water and 4 napkins to the floor in a big wet mess. What a man! (The audience responded as to St. George slaying a fire-breathing dragon)

Depositing Rae at a motel Bobby goes home again. There he finds Daddy totally paralyzed, sister having sex identification problems and brother with strained neck causing him to switch from violin to piano.

Brother has a young, beautiful, female protege shackled up at Daddy's mansion. This does not escape Bobby's notice. First, though, he must humiliate her - then- to bed. Alright, get this: Catherine (girl protege) requests an earful of Bobby's virtuosity. Bobby runs through a piece. Catherine solemnly admits she's been moved by the feeling he's put into it. Now Bobby moves in for the kill. You see, Bobby wasn't feeling anything while he played, Catherine is a phony! He attacks. She defends, struggles, evaporates in his arms. Bobby has caught and branded another phony. (If we didn't have Bobby and Holden Caulfield and all those terribly sensitive boys around, you can imagine the atrocities we'd be getting away with.)

Penis envy: Sister seems to be confused. First she balks about not being invited to a family "summit conferance" at which all male members were in attendance (which occasions the epithet "penis envy" from brother); then she abeds with a lout about the house, hired to take care of Daddy. Bobby attacks lout when he catches them together like that, which is, of course, dictated by the rules of chivalry.

Next Rae shows up at Big Daddy's. It seems the money Bobby gave her has run out and, hell, I guess she's curious. At the dinner table Rae acts her dumb, culturally deprived self. Bobby is annoyed and shows it. But, later that evening, when 'intellectual woman' (middle-aged as well) responds in the same contemptuous way to Rae, Bobby jumps to her defense, calling 'intellectual woman' a "creep" and a "pompous celibate". What are the rules of the game, then? I wonder.

Lastly, Bobby has it out with Daddy. Here, he finally reveals himself: "I move around alot. Not because I'm looking for anything. But

I'm trying to get away from things that get bad if I stay." Daddy is the perfect audience for this kind of revelation since he can't so much as move an eyelash in response. Bobby cries (tears): "But, you know, I was never really good at it." What isn't this sensitive boy good at? He's good at every sort of swinish behavior I can think of, including leaving Rae (pregnant) on the road on the trip back from Daddy's place.

Why do they (audiences) so love this man? What has he got to be so nasty about? Upper-class, white, Christian, male. They love him, I think, because he is a constant sufferer; because he's devoted to dissatisfaction. Men (and I think it's males who have made this picture a success) make a religion out of the most refined, senseless and finicky suffering. (e.g. Judaism and Christianity) Now Rae is too crude to suffer. Maybe she makes \$60 a week and works her ass off. She is not the one we are to identify with. As for middle-aged women, they're a stock joke. What about Miss Culture, Her Royal Pianist? She can't tell feeling from mere proficiency. She's a 'phony'. Who are these nits lousing up the hair of our sensitive boy!

Right on Bobby! We all identify with you!

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