

English s24. British New Wave Film

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Office hours: Tuesday 9-10 and by appointment

Pettigrew 307

Course Description: This course studies significant achievements in British cinema from the late 1950s to the early 1970s. Many national cinemas underwent a liberating change in the 1960s, usually called by the name, “New Wave.” British cinema in the 60s is not as influential as the French New Wave (nouvelle vague) exemplified by Godard, Truffaut, Rivette, Chabrol, and others. Yet there are many important and interesting British films from this period, by directors such as Joseph Losey, Lindsay Anderson, and John Schlesinger. In this course we will look at films by auteurs such as Michael Powell, “kitchen sink” films by Jack Clayton and Karel Reisz, “swinging London” films by Richard Lester and Nicolas Roeg, in addition to masterpieces by foreign artists such as Stanley Kubrick and Michelangelo Antonioni.

Schedule

- M April 26 Robert Hamer, Kind Hearts and Coronets (1949)
T 27 Mike Hodges, Get Carter (1971)
W 28 Michael Powell, Peeping Tom (1960)
Th 29 Joseph Losey, The Servant (1963)
- M May 3 Richard Lester, A Hard Day’s Night (1964)
T 4 Richard Lester, The Knack. . . And How to Get It (1965)
W 5 Nicolas Roeg, Performance (1970)
Th 6 Michelangelo Antonioni, Blow-Up (1966)
- M May 10 Jack Clayton, Room at the Top (1958)
T 11 Karel Reisz, Saturday Night and Sunday Morning (1960)
W 12 John Schlesinger, Billy Liar (1963)
Th 13 Desmond Davis, Girl With Green Eyes (1964)
F 14 (Final Project Proposals Due)
- M May 17 Stanley Kubrick, Dr. Stangelove, or, How I Learned to Stop Worrying
And Love the Bomb (1963)
T 18 Stanley Kubrick, A Clockwork Orange (1971)
W 19 (discussion 12:30-1:30)
- Th May 27 final project due, 5:00 p.m.

Grades

There will be a written, one-page response due in class the day after each film. I will provide a set of questions for these papers before the showing of each movie. I will also be taking attendance for both the discussion and the movie-watching portions of the class. Reasoning: Instead of motivating attendance by giving exams, I will try to motivate attendance by taking attendance. No matter how energetic and fascinating these movies may be (which they are some of the time), they usually can't compete with fine weather and etc. Short terms are theoretically supposed to be full-time classes that explore topics that might not be otherwise presented in the regular semester. So I am asking you for some time and some writing. There will still be plenty of time for other, non-cinematic things. Most mathematically: everyone starts with an "A." If you hand in all the daily assignments (14) in satisfactory condition, you still have an A. Each assignment missed automatically makes the grade go down 1/3 (i.e. A to A-, A- to B+). Each time you are absent without an official dean's excuse, same thing: the grade goes down 1/3. So you can calculate what you are willing to miss. The final project will be weighted at about 30% of the grade, but you can't improve the grade with your final project, only keep it the same. For example, if you have a B+ going into the final project, that's the highest grade you can get for the whole short term unit.

I'm sorry to be so strict about the homeworks, but if I don't do this, then short term gravity takes over and people won't do even a minimal amount of work. I think what I am asking is not too horrible.

I have tried to choose movies that are interesting and suitable for discussion. They are often challenging, but not determinedly bizarre or off-putting. Sometimes they are even fun. I will try to conclude the discussion period by 1:20, so that we can start the day's movie promptly at 1:30. Since the movies usually last 1 _ to 2 hours, you should be free by 3 or 3:30 in the afternoon. Only A Clockwork Orange goes much past 2 hours.

Final Projects

I would like a brief proposal of your final project by the end of the third week (Friday, May 14). The most straightforward project would be to write a longer paper (8-10pp) about a film. This could be a film that we are not watching in class, or it could be a film that we have seen but which you think needs more discussion.

You could also work up a more creative project, which could take place on the written page or in the form of a videotape or DVD. For example, you could write a British new wave screenplay (or some pages thereof) or film a response to one or more of our movies. Creative responses need not be overtly analytical, but it is hoped that they will nonetheless stand as substantial replies. (You might write up a short introduction to explain what you are doing.) While I might well be pleased to look directly upon a cinematic final project, I cannot in any way advise you on the logistics. You'll be responsible for commandeering equipment, knowledge, and catering services.

Films From This Period Not On The Syllabus But Strangely Enough In The Library

(You might want to write a final paper about one of these movies, or, theoretically, watch some of these films in addition to the films on the syllabus.)

Lindsay Anderson, If. . . (1969)

Lindsay Anderson, This Sporting Life (1963)

Lindsay Anderson, O Lucky Man! (1973)

Peter Brook, Lord of the Flies (1963)

Sidney Furie, The Leather Boys (1964)

Lewis Gilbert, Alfie (1965)

Stanley Kubrick, Barry Lyndon (1975)

Roman Polanski, Repulsion (1965)

Reisz, Karel, Morgan: A Suitable Case For Treatment (1966)

Tony Richardson, Look Back in Anger (1959)

Tony Richardson, The Loneliness of the Long Distance Runner (1962)

John Schlesinger, Darling (1965)

Film Study

The study of films is now a recognizable academic discipline, just like the study of literature, anthropology, or physics. There are professors of film studies and books on art film and Hollywood film. Like many fields in the humanities, there is controversy about appropriate methodology or where the field begins and ends. As the course goes along, I will introduce from time to time some technical language associated with film study, in addition to some of the larger problems that attend the field. You don't necessarily need to copy down everything, and you won't be tested on such things, but I suggest keeping a notebook in case there are words, movies, or directors that come up that you might want to check on later. In my imagination, there will be some of you who will want to follow up on this class in one form or another. There are different kinds of students in this class; there are several film studies majors, who have seen a great many films from different time periods and different countries; there are also some students who may not have seen films from outside the U.S. or from before 1980. I'm hoping the film studies majors will see how British films fit into what they already know about the history of film, and I'm hoping that those of you who have mostly watched Hollywood films will see that movies from other countries and earlier times have something to offer.

British New Wave-Introduction

British cinema has always had an inferiority complex, not only with respect to Hollywood but also to other European cinemas. And for good reason: British cinema has often seemed too restrained, too literary, or too theatrical. The epigraph of Roy Armes' A Critical History of British Cinema (1978) quotes François Truffaut:

Well, to put it bluntly, isn't there a certain incompatibility between the terms "cinema" and "Britain"?

British cinema has often seemed to lack the invention of the French, the Germans, or the Italians, not to mention the money of Hollywood. Whereas the words "French" or "Italian" or "American" may well conjure up ideas of risk and passion, sexuality and experiment, the idea of the "British" usually signifies something more restrained and cerebral. Restrained and cerebral cinema? That sounds a little dull. What does "British" mean in these films?

British films often emphasize Britishness. Britishness (the Queen, the BBC, Shakespeare) is a recognizable and exportable commodity, and British films have often tried to promote a positive sense of England and the English tradition. England has always specialized in the "heritage" film, costume films which tie into a usually positive sense of British history. (On these films in recent years, see Andrew Higson, English Heritage, English Cinema: Costume Drama Since 1980 [Oxford, 2003]). How do these British films from the 1960s look at England? How do they represent class and power?

British "new wave" films are usually thought of as those that introduce a startling new sense of realism to the screen. These are sometimes called the "kitchen sink" films, and they usually feature an "angry young man." We'll look at some of those in Week 3. Films that connect more closely to the crazy happenings of the 60s will be studied in the second week; these are the "Swinging London" films. What many critics miss in British new wave is the sense of the director as "auteur," the sense that the director has a clear vision which he imposes on his films from one to the next. The problem with British new wave, according to many critics, is that British new wave films are often adaptations from novels and plays, so there's not the same sense of authorship that we see in Godard or Truffaut. British films were also more unionized than in France, which also makes for a more corporate structure. Thus I've filled out the syllabus by choosing films that are by canonized "auteurs," Michael Powell, Joseph Losey, Stanley Kubrick, Michelangelo Antonioni.

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Facts For the Day

I. Important British Film directors before 1960

David Lean, Brief Encounter (1945), Great Expectations (1946), Oliver Twist (1948), The Bridge on the River Kwai (1957), Lawrence of Arabia (1962), Doctor Zhivago (1965)

Carol Reed, Odd Man Out (1947), The Third Man (1949)

Michael Powell, The Life and Death of Colonel Blimp (1943), A Matter of Life and Death (1946), Black Narcissus (1947), The Red Shoes (1948)

Alfred Hitchcock made films in the U.K. from 1923 to 1939, including the first British sound film, Blackmail (1929) and The Thirty-Nine Steps (1935). After many decades in Hollywood, he returned to England to make his penultimate film, Frenzy (1972).

II. British Money pre-1971, i.e. pre-decimalization

12 pence in a shilling

20 shillings in a pound

“bob” is slang for a shilling

“quid” is slang for a pound

“crown” is a 5 shilling piece (5 bob)

III. The British Film Institute

The British Film Institute has supported British film and criticism since 1933. They publish many excellent books, in addition to the magazine Sight and Sound. I will sometimes copy you pages out of Sight and Sound magazines from the 1960s, although unfortunately our library’s holdings do not go back that far. Their internet home is: www.bfi.org.uk. If you do an onsite search for “British New Wave” you’ll get all kinds of definitions and links. I recommend looking at both this site and also an issue or two of Sight and Sound (in the periodical section of the library).

HW1

Kind Hearts and Coronets

The Ealing studios produced some of the most famous and well-loved films of mid-century Britain. Ealing was especially known for their comedies, and Kind Hearts and Coronets is perhaps the most famous of them all. Other Ealing comedies include Passport to Pimlico, The Lavender Hill Mob, The Man in the White Suit, and The Ladykillers (this last now re-made by the Coen brothers, starring Tom Hanks). The definitive work on the Ealing Studios is by Charles Barr.

In this film we will be especially interested in describing the way the comedy works, and also the film's sense of Britishness.

Please write a one-page (typed) response to one of the following questions.

- 1) How would you characterize the sense of humor in this film?
- 2) What are we supposed to think of Louis Mazzini, the main character? Likeable? How do we judge or sympathize with him?
- 3) How does this film treat English culture? Reverentially? Satirically?
- 4) How would you characterize the ending of this film? (happy, sad? close, open?) What is the tone?

notes:

You don't need to consult any outside sources. If you use an outside source, you need to cite that. Sometimes it is useful to look at an internet site just for a factoid or two (like, what is that character's name again?) But anything more than a factoid needs to be referenced.

How you want to prepare to write these little papers is up to you. You might just watch the movie with a piece of paper and a pen and scribble in the dark. You might sit quietly for five minutes afterwards and jot down things while they are fresh in your mind, or race outside into the sunshine, and then sit quietly and jot things down.

There will be a copy of the movie on reserve. So if you want to refresh your memory about something you should be able to do that. I do not want people watching the whole movie for the first time in the library; that's why I'm taking attendance at the viewing sessions. We don't have enough copies of movies to be able to do that.