

British Cinema and the Past

FTVF2F07
Autumn 2008



Unit Convenor: Dr Keith M. Johnston

Office: Room A2.35

Office hours: Tuesdays 3.00-4.00pm; Wednesdays 10.00-11.00am

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Summary

Period films have occupied a prominent position in British film culture for over a century. Their enduring popularity among both filmmakers and audiences raises a range of aesthetic, ideological and practical issues. What techniques and conventions do they use to depict the past? What visions of the British past do they offer? What pleasures do they provide for their audiences? How important are foreign audiences and investment? Do films about the past provide escapist entertainment, or do they enable filmmakers (and audiences) to address contemporary concerns?

This unit will investigate these and other issues by examining the depiction of the past in British cinema from the 1950s to the present. It is structured thematically, linking key films to key issues while also establishing broader trends across the genre. The films to be studied include literary adaptations, historical epics, war films, spoofs, biopics and romantic comedies. The range of filmmaking styles illustrates the diversity of British period films and the extensive ways in which the past has been used in British cinema.

Aims and Objectives

This unit aims to:

- Explore key aspects of British cinema and how the film industry has chosen to represent the past;
- Investigate a specific type of filmmaking and situate it in its national and historical context;
- Encourage critical engagement with the major thinkers and debates within this field;
- Interrogate the relationship between re-creation, pastiche, memory and history.

Learning Outcomes

By the end of the unit you will:

- Acquire a systematic knowledge of key aspects of British period cinema and the major debates these films have generated.
- Situate the unit films in their historical context and reflected on their relevance to issues of British national identity.
- Further develop skills in analysing both film texts and critical literature.
- Present this knowledge and these skills in a scholarly manner using academic and non-academic sources and frameworks.
- Carry out independent research based on appropriate research questions, using and evaluating a range of materials in order to arrive at conclusions.
- Demonstrate critical and interpretative skills in the analysis of both films and academic literature.
- Show evidence of debating and other communication skills in inter-personal settings and the ability to work as part of a group.

Reading

You are required to complete the assigned preparatory reading for each seminar. Although there is no set text; all reading material is available to purchase as a dossier. Suggested further reading has either been listed on the week-by-week schedule, or will be noted during weekly seminars.

Viewing

Screenings are an integral part of the unit and will form a substantial part of weekly seminar discussions and essay topics.

Films will be screened on Monday afternoons, starting at 5.00pm.

All screenings take place in **Arts 3.03**. Full details are provided in the week-by-week schedule that follows. This is the ideal screening time, the day before the weekly seminar, and it is important to attend these screenings unless you have good reason: in which case, you need to make alternative viewing arrangements in advance. If you are unable to attend screenings, please make sure you have watched the film in your own time **before the seminar discussion**.

All of the material being screened is available on videotape or DVD in the AV section of the Library. However, in some cases the Library only possesses lower-quality video copies. In order to see these films as they were intended, projected in high resolution on a (relatively) large screen, and in a communal atmosphere, please make every effort to attend the scheduled screenings.

You may find it useful to make notes on the films during the screenings to help discussion in seminars and to prepare for your assessed work. A variety of other excerpts from films and short films will also be screened in seminars.

Seminars

Seminar work will involve the analysis, interpretation and discussion of the critical material and film screening for that week. Everyone is expected to contribute to the seminar by regular participation and response. It is important to bring the week's reading to the seminar, as well as some notes and ideas on the screenings and readings. Seminars will encourage the discussion and presentation of ideas within small group and whole class settings.

Regular attendance at seminars is a basic, commonsense requirement of the UEA system. If you have to miss a seminar for good reason, please let me know by e-mail (keith.johnston@uea.ac.uk), if possible in advance (and arrange, if appropriate, for a medical certificate to be put into the system).

Assessment

There are two assignments in this unit:

1. Essay 1, of 2,500 words, worth 50% of the grade, is due by **12pm Wednesday 29th October (week 6)**
2. Essay 2, of 2,500 words, worth 50% of the grade, is due by **12pm Wednesday 10th December (week 12)**

All work should be submitted via the **FTV School Office (Room A2.40)**, using the essay booking in system. It is important that you meet the deadlines for handing in coursework. **Late submission of work** (in the absence of acceptable extenuating circumstances) will be penalised in accordance with student policy (www.uea.ac.uk/ltg/penaltieslatesub.pdf). Please ensure you are familiar with the University's policy. If you have any doubts, please consult me.

All assignments must be submitted in order to pass the unit.

An overview of the two assignments follows:**First assignment (due 12pm Wednesday 22nd October)**

Write a 2, 500 word essay that compares and contrasts two of the films screened in Weeks 1-5, in relation to the critical debates around the construction of the past and their status as adaptations. Further information will be circulated in week 3.

Second assignment (due 12pm, Wednesday 10th December)

A 2, 500 word essay that addresses the topics of the latter half of the module. Your essays will be expected to engage with one or more of the following issues: the role of historical cinema within the modern British film industry; how such films visually re-create the past; what further problems are inherent in representing a modern period. Further information will be available in the second half of the course.

These written assignments require the development of knowledge and understanding within specific aspects of the field. This will be achieved through the use of academic and non-academic sources and frameworks. The assignments also require command of IT facilities and the conventions of scholarly presentation.

Return of coursework

Essays will be marked and returned to you within fifteen working days of the deadline or, in the case of essay two, during the first week after the Christmas break.

Essay 1 will be returned by **Wednesday 19th November 2008**.

Essay 2 will be returned by **Monday 12th January 2009**.

Coursework and assessment

Your essay should adhere to proper academic conventions, particularly in the citation of sources and bibliographic data.

Plagiarism and Collusion

Instances of plagiarism and collusion are taken seriously by the University; the new guidelines can be read by following the link below:

www.uea.ac.uk/ltg/Calendar/Calendar%202005-06/CalRegs/11PLAGCOLLPOLICY.pdf

Students who deliberately plagiarise or collude threaten the values and beliefs that underpin academic work and devalue the integrity of the University's awards. In proven cases, offenders shall be punished, and the punishment may extend to failing their degree, temporary suspension or expulsion from further study at the University if the case comes before a Discipline Committee of the University. Plagiarism and collusion, at any stage of a student's course, whether discovered before or after graduation, will be investigated and dealt with appropriately by the University.

Week by Week Agenda

Week 1: Introduction

In this introductory week, we consider the issues inherent in studying a national cinema such as Britain. Looking at what the course will cover, we will begin to debate the representations of 'the past' that are intrinsic to the films that critics have defined, variously, as 'historical,' 'period,' 'heritage' and 'costume' films.

Screening: Monday 22nd September: [no screening]

Seminar: Tuesday 23rd September, 1-3pm Arts 2.18

Reading: Excerpt from Marcia Landy, 'The Historical Film,' in *British Genres: Cinema and Society, 1930-60*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991, pp. 53-60.

Additional reading:

Andrew Higson, 'The English Heritage Film in the 1980s and 1990s: Mapping the Field,' pp. 9-45 in *English Heritage, English Cinema: Costume Drama Since 1980*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003.

Week 2: Adapting the Past: Literature and Film

This week considers a key area of British cinema's representations of the past: adaptations of classic literature. Since the days of silent cinema, the British film industry has chosen to translate books and plays into film: from Charles Dickens to Jane Austen, Thomas Hardy to Sir Arthur Conan-Doyle. We will consider the problems of adaptation through notions of textual fidelity, recreating the visual 'reality' of the past, and the canonisation of known 'classics'.

Screening: Monday 29th September: *Sense & Sensibility* (Lee, 1995) Arts 3.03

Seminar: Tuesday 30th September, 1-3pm Arts 2.18

Reading: Imelda Whelehan, 'Adaptations: The Contemporary Dilemmas,' in Cartmell and Whelehan (eds.), *Adaptations: From Text to Screen, Screen to Text*. London: Routledge, 1999, pp. 3-20.

Andrew Higson, 'English Heritage, English Literature, English Cinema: Selling Jane Austen to Movie Audiences in the 1990s,' in Eckart-Voigts-Virchow (ed.) *Janespotting and Beyond*. Tübingen: Gunter Narr Verlag Tübingen, 2004, pp. 35-50.

Additional reading:

Sarah Cardwell, *Adaptation Revisited*. Manchester: MUP, 2003.

Additional viewing:

Pride & Prejudice (Wright, 2005), *Emma* (McGrath, 1996), *Pride & Prejudice* (BBC TV 1995), *Scrooge* (Hurst, 1951), *Oliver Twist* (Lean, 1948), *Great Expectations* (Lean, 1946), *Bright Young Things* (Fry, 2003), *Far From the Madding Crowd* (Schlesinger, 1967), *Jude* (Winterbottom, 1996), *Tom Jones* (Richardson, 1963)

Week 3: British Genre Cinema and the Past 1: The Horror Film

Should the 'period' or 'historical' film be classified as a genre? Exploring how films about the past intersect with genre theory, this week examines the British horror film of the 1950s-70s. Most closely associated with the Hammer studios, these films deal (almost exclusively) with horrific narratives set in a British or European past.

Screening: Mon 6th Oct.: *The Hound of the Baskervilles* (Fisher, 1959) Arts 3.03

Seminar: Tuesday 7th October, 1-3pm Arts 2.18

Reading: Peter Hutchings, 'For sadists only? The problem of British horror,' in Hutchings, *Hammer and Beyond: The British Horror Film*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1993, pp. 3-23.

Additional reading:

Marcia Landy, 'Horror and Science Fiction,' in *British Genres: Cinema and Society 1930-60*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991, pp. 388-95 and 412-22.

Additional viewing:

The Curse of Frankenstein (Fisher, 1958), *Dracula* (Fisher, 1958)

Week 4 The Heritage Debate

During the 1980s, the Thatcher government's view of 'great' British history and the success of organisations such as the National Trust added to the growing commodification of the past. Addressing how this 'heritage' culture had been employed within cinema, Andrew Higson adopted the term 'heritage film.' Contentious at the time, and in the years since, this week we will debate Higson's original intent, the recent ripostes to his argument, and ask whether the larger social picture of 1980s Britain explains the growth of 'heritage cinema.'

Screening: Monday 13th October: *A Room With A View* (Ivory, 1985) Arts 3.03

Seminar: Tuesday 14th October, 1-3pm Arts 2.18

Reading: Andrew Higson, 'Re-presenting the national past: nostalgia and pastiche in the heritage film,' in Friedman (ed.) *British Cinema and Thatcherism: Fires Were Started*. London: UCL Press, 1993, pp. 109-29.

Claire Monk, 'The British heritage-film debate revisited,' in Claire Monk and Amy Sergeant (eds.), *British Historical Cinema*. London: Routledge, 2002, pp. 176-98.

Additional reading:

John Hill, 'The Heritage Film: Issues and Debates,' in Hill, *British Cinema in the 1980s*. Oxford: OUP, 1999, pp. 73-98.

Additional viewing:

Maurice (Ivory, 1987), *A Handful of Dust* (DurrIDGE, 1988), *Howards End* (Ivory, 1992), *Remains of the Day* (Ivory, 1993)

Week 5: 'Our Finest Hour': Changing Representations of World War II
 Despite the Second World War looming large in discussions of British culture, history and identity, most discussions of historical cinema do not extend into this period. 1940s wartime films such as *The Lion Has Wings* or *The Way Ahead* developed a propagandistic view of Britain pulling together, but this week we will explore how subsequent decades have seen British film (and television) revisit and revise opinions and attitudes towards 'our finest hour.'

Screening: Monday 20th October: *Atonement* (Wright, 2007) Arts 3.03
Seminar: Tuesday 21st October, 1-3pm Arts 2.18

Reading: Robert Murphy, 'Introduction' and 'Fallout: The Enduring Fascination of the Second World War,' in *British Cinema and the Second World War*, London: Continuum, 2000, pp. 1-8 and 239-68.

Additional viewing:

The Battle of the River Plate (Powell & Pressburger, 1956), *Reach for the Sky* (Gilbert, 1956), *The Dambusters* (Anderson, 1955), *Dunkirk* (Norman, 1958), *The Land Girls* (Leland, 1998)

Week 6: Tutorial Week

Week 7: British Genre Cinema and the Past 2: Comedy
 Moving away from adaptation, this week we consider how another popular British genre – the comedy film – has represented the past. Although traditionally seen as a genre dealing with contemporary life – the Ealing comedies of the 1940s-50s, or the recent series of Hugh Grant-Richard Curtis films – two of British cinema's most notorious comedy teams often used the past to satirise contemporary events or comment on society.

Screening: Monday 3rd November: *Carry On Cleo* (Thomas, 1964) **and** *Monty Python & The Holy Grail* (Jones/Gilliam, 1975) Arts 3.03
Seminar: Tuesday 4th November, 1-3pm Arts 2.18

Reading: Nicholas J. Cull, 'Camping on the borders: History, identity and Britishness in the *Carry On* costume parodies, 1963-74,' in Monk and Sergeant (eds), *British Historical Cinema*. London: Routledge, 2002, pp. 92-107.

Additional viewing:

Carry On Up the Khyber (Thomas, 1968), *Carry On... Don't Lose Your Head* (Thomas, 1966), *Carry On Henry* (Thomas, 1971), *Monty Python's Life of Brian* (Jones, 1979), *A Cock and Bull Story* (Winterbottom, 2005)

Week 8: Modern Myth-making: The Scottish Screen

Although this course reiterates the term 'British' cinema, this week we explore the idea of multiple 'national' cinemas within Great Britain. Focusing on Scottish cinema, we will look at the ways that films both from, and about, Scotland, have turned to the past in order to define new national myths of independence and culture.

Screening: Monday 10th November: *Braveheart* (Gibson, 1995) Arts 3.03

Seminar: Tuesday 11th November, 1-3pm Arts 2.18

Reading: Duncan Petrie, 'The Jacobite Legacy,' in *Screening Scotland*. London: BFI, 2000, pp. 53-73.

Colin McArthur, 'Scotland and the *Braveheart* Effect,' in *Brigadoon, Braveheart and the Scots: Distortions of Scotland in Hollywood Cinema*. London: I.B. Tauris, 2003, pp. 123-36.

Additional viewing:

Rob Roy (Caton-Jones, 1995), *Ivanhoe* (Thorpe, 1952), *Local Hero* (Forsyth, 1983), *Brigadoon* (Minnelli, 1954)

Week 9: The Sun Never Sets: Screening Britain's Imperial Past

Britain's imperial and colonial past has been the basis for many classic British movies, from the epics *The Four Feathers* and *Lawrence of Arabia* to the more comedic *Carry On Up the Khyber*. This week, we will examine this series of films to discover how British historical films have treated this period in history, and its potent issues around race, class and nationality.

Screening: Monday 17th Nov.: *Zulu* (Endfield, 1964) Arts 3.03

Seminar: Tuesday 18th November, 1-3pm Arts 2.18

Reading: James Chapman, 'Men of Harlech: *Zulu*,' in *Past and Present: National Identity and The British Historical Film*. London: I.B. Tauris, 2005, pp. 199-227.

Sheldon Hall, 'Monkey Feathers: Defending *Zulu* (1964),' in Monk and Sergeant (eds.), *British Historical Cinema*, London: Routledge, 2002, pp. 110-28.

Additional viewing:

The Man Who Would Be King (Huston, 1975), *A Passage to India* (Lean, 1984), *The Life and Death of Colonel Blimp* (Powell & Pressburger, 1943), *Carry On Up the Khyber* (Thomas, 1966)

Week 10: Of Kings and Queens: Biography and Royalty

British historical films often address the past by recreating the life of a famous Briton. While these films have portrayed people as diverse as Captain Scott (*Scott of the Antarctic*) and Beatrix Potter (*Miss Potter*), the dominant subject matter remains the British monarchy. This week we will explore the initial interest in representing the ‘private’ lives of kings and queens in the 1930s, and British cinema’s return to the monarchy in the 1990s.

Screening: Monday 24th November: *Elizabeth* (Kapur, 1998) Arts 3.03
Seminar: Tuesday 25th November, 1-3pm Arts 2.18

Reading: Kara MacKenzie, ‘Taking Liberties With the Monarch: The Royal Bio-Pic in the 1990s,’ in Monk & Sergeant (eds.), *British Historical Cinema*, London: Routledge, 2002, pp. 217-36.

James Chapman, ‘Queen and Country: *Elizabeth*,’ in *Past and Present: National Identity and The British Historical Film*. London: I.B. Tauris, 2005, pp. 299-318.

Additional viewing:

The Private Life of Henry VIII (Korda, 1933), *The Madness of King George* (Hytner, 1994), *Mrs Brown* (Madden, 1997), *The Queen* (Frears, 2006), *Elizabeth: The Golden Age* (Kapur, 2007)

Week 11: The ‘Americanisation’ of the Past – and Present?

Many of the period films described as being ‘British’ are often directed by and star non-Brits. With filmmakers actively using these films to target specific international audience demographics (and awards), is it possible to describe modern period films such as *Shakespeare in Love* or *Pride & Prejudice* as being ‘British’? At the same time, period film-making conventions seem to be influencing other genres and films within Britain: this week, we will examine whether the “*Four Weddings*” effect has changed how modern day Britain is represented in contemporary film.

Screening: Monday 1st Dec.: *Shakespeare in Love* (Madden, 1998) Arts 3.03
Seminar: Tuesday 2nd December, 1-3pm Arts 2.18

Reading: Elizabeth Klett, ‘*Shakespeare in Love* and the End(s) of History,’ in Cartmell, Hunter and Whelehan, *Retrovision: Reinventing the Past in Film and Fiction*. London: Pluto Press, 2001, pp. 25-40.

Additional reading:

Nigel Mather, *Tears of Laughter: Comedy-drama in 1990s British Cinema*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2006, pp. 149-59.

Additional viewing:

Notting Hill (Mitchell, 1997), *Love Actually* (Curtis, 2005)

Week 12: Recreating the Recent Past

Concluding our survey of British films and the past, we problematise the notion of 'period' and 'historical' cinema by considering how the recent past has been represented on film. Given the focus of critical and industrial attention on the 18th, 19th and early 20th centuries, does the move to a more recent time period (within living memory for a large percentage of the audience) change how films approach their recreation of a time period and event?

Screening: Monday 8th December: *The Queen* (Frears, 2006) Arts 3.03

Seminar: Tuesday 9th December, 1-3pm Arts 2.18

Reading: To be confirmed.

Additional viewing:

Let Him Have It (Medak, 1991), *Dance With A Stranger* (Newell, 1985), *Backbeat* (Softley, 1994), *Scandal* (Caton-Jones, 1989), *The Krays* (Medak, 1990), *East is East* (O'Donnell, 1999), *Ratcatcher* (Ramsay, 1999), *Small Faces* (MacKinnon, 1996), *Billy Elliot* (Daldry, 2000), *This is England* (Meadows, 2006)

Additional / Background Reading List

- Ashby, Justine & Andrew Higson (eds.) *British Cinema Past & Present*, London: Routledge, 2000.
- Cardwell, Sarah. *Adaptation Revisited*. Manchester: MUP, 2003.
- Cartmell, Deborah and Imelda Whelehan (eds.), *Adaptations: From Text to Screen, Screen to Text*. London: Routledge, 1999.
- Cartmell, Deborah, I.Q. Hunter and Imelda Whelehan (eds.). *Retrovision: Reinventing the Past in Film and Fiction*. London: Pluto Press, 2001.
- Chapman, James. *Past and Present: National Identity and The British Historical Film*. London: I.B. Tauris, 2005.
- Cook, Pam. *Fashioning the Nation: Costume and Identity in British Cinema*. London: BFI, 1996.
- _____. *Screening the Past: Memory and Nostalgia in Cinema*. London: Routledge, 2005.
- Dave, Paul, *Visions of England: Class and Culture in Contemporary Cinema*. Oxford: Berg, 2006.
- Eckart-Voigts-Virchow (ed.) *Janespotting and Beyond*. Tübingen: Gunter Narr Verlag Tübingen, 2004.
- Friedman, Lester (ed.) *British Cinema and Thatcherism: Fires Were Started*. London: UCL Press, 1993.
- Harper, Sue. *Picturing the Past: The Rise and Fall of the British Costume Film*. London: BFI, 1994.
- Higson, Andrew. *Waving the Flag: Constructing a National Cinema in Britain*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995.
- _____. *English Heritage, English Cinema: Costume Drama Since 1980*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003.
- Hill, John. *British Cinema in the 1980s*. Oxford: OUP, 1999.
- Hutchings, Peter. *Hammer and Beyond: The British Horror Film*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1993.
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- Landy, Marcia. *British Genres: Cinema and Society, 1930-60*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991.
- Landy, Marcia. *Cinematic Uses of the Past*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996.
- Mather, Nigel. *Tears of Laughter: Comedy-drama in 1990s British Cinema*. Manchester: MUP, 2006.
- Monk, Claire and Amy Sergeant (eds.). *British Historical Cinema*. London: Routledge, 2002.
- Murphy, Robert. *British Cinema and the Second World War*, London: Continuum, 2000.
- Petrie, Duncan. *Screening Scotland*. London: BFI, 2000.
- Sorlin, Pierre. *The Film in History: Restaging the Past*. Oxford: Blackwell, 1980.
- Street, Sarah. *British National Cinema*. London: Routledge, 1997.
- Troost, Linda & Sayre Greenfield (eds.) *Jane Austen in Hollywood*. Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 2001.
- Vincendeau, Ginette (ed.) *Film/Literature/Heritage: A Sight & Sound Reader*. London: BFI, 2000.