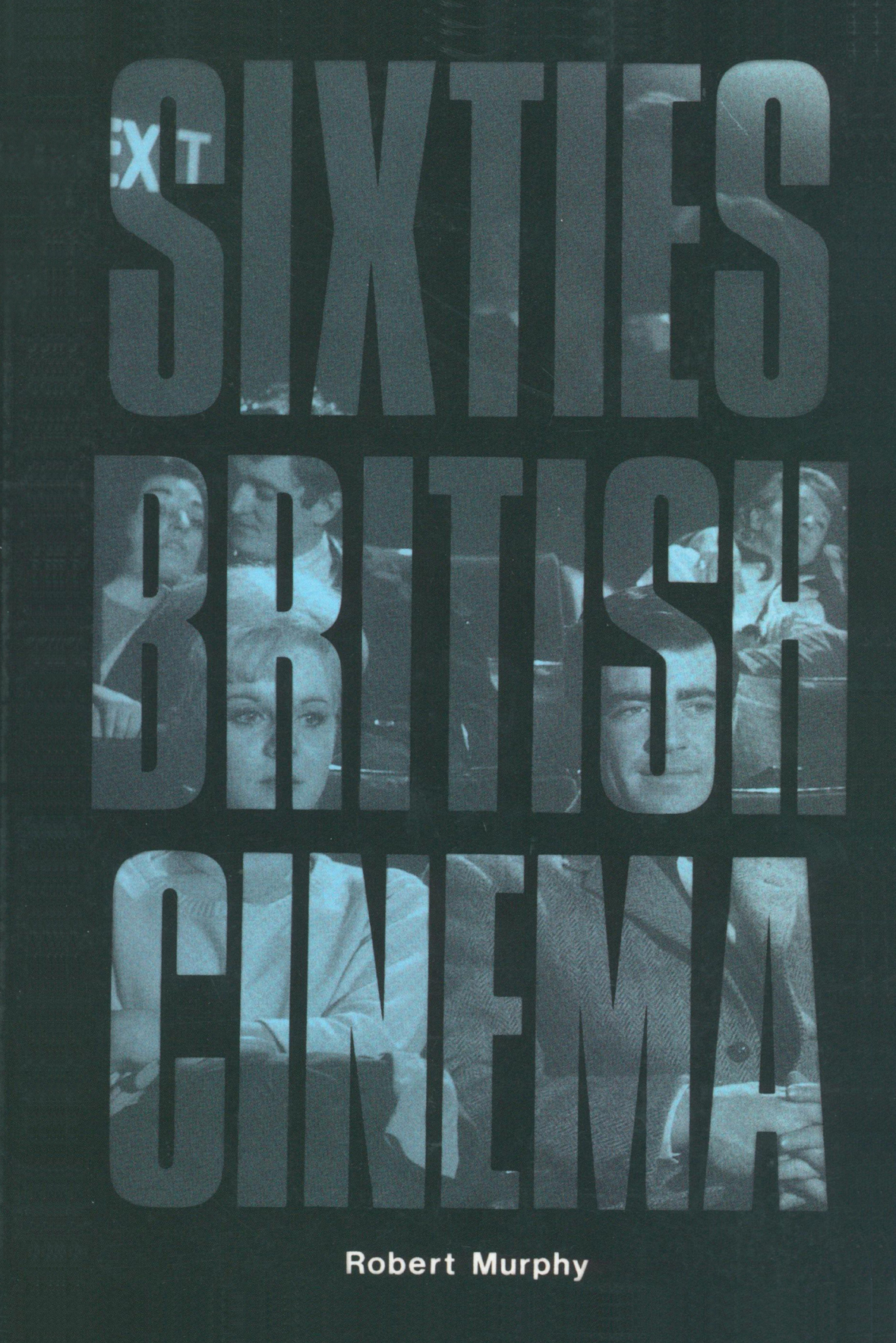
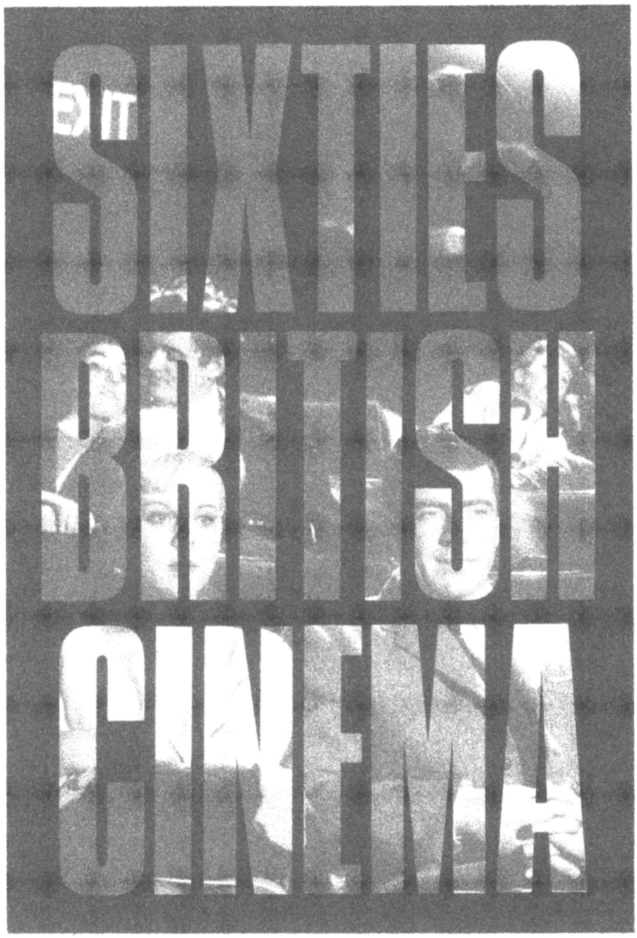


Robert Murphy

SIXTIES BRITISH CINEMA



Robert Murphy

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Still: Alan Bates and June Ritchie in *A Kind of Loving* (John Schlesinger, 1962)

For Clare and Edward

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R.M.

INTRODUCTION

> Whatever the Swinging Sixties are going to be remembered for it won't be films. The moment you saw a red London bus go through the shot you knew you were in for a rotten time. (Alan Parker, *A Turnip-Head's Guide to British Cinema*, 1986)[1]

The nature of 1960s society is, even now, a contentious issue and interpretations tend to be more subjective and unreliable than those of most periods. In 1978, Peter York made the point that:

> when asked about the sixties, there seems to be a qualitative difference in people's response – they seem to be confused about what really happened [to them] and what the media had said was happening. This kind of conceptualizing seems true across the social board. Most people under forty, in describing the sixties, at least defer to the media sixties.[2]

But the media interpretations are mutually incompatible. Christopher Booker's influential history of the 1960s, *The Neophiliacs*, shows Britain as a recklessly decadent, fantasy-ridden society, an image eagerly seized upon by Margaret Thatcher and the Conservative Party as a contrast to the 'realism' they imposed upon the country after 1979. To unreconstructed liberals and the ageing glitterati of the period, it is a golden age when Vidal Sassoon haircuts, Mary Quant clothes and the Beatles made Britain the cultural centre of the world.

Similarly simplistic myths surround the films. Paul Willemen, in reviewing John Hill's *Sex, Class and Realism*, complains that 'it is unfortunate that it deals with British cinema from 1956 to 1963, the drabbest period in an already drab national cinema.'[3] And though Willemen can hardly be said to represent critical orthodoxy, the image of the 'Kitchen Sink' films as glum, drab and visually boring still lingers.

Lindsay Anderson, in a polemical defence of what he calls the'tradition of Free Cinema', claims that his films, along with those of Karel Reisz and Tony Richardson, have been dismissed as 'unimaginative social realism or dreary political propaganda'.[4] This is a half-truth: with the exception of Richardson's untidy adaptation of *The Entertainer* and his more unjustly maligned *The Loneliness of the Long Distance Runner*, the balance of critical opinion was in favour of the 'Kitchen Sink' films; and when, after a period of neglect, interest in British cinema among film critics and historians revived, the socially concerned cinema of the early 60s became a site for critical debate. Ironically, in view of Anderson's resolutely anti-Establishment position, most of the criticism has been of their limited, reformist aims. R. Barton Palmer, in her study of *Room at the Top*, concludes that:

> A thoroughgoing examination of New Wave films will, I believe, reveal the movement's unquestioning endorsement of the traditional fictionalising function of British cinema: to provide 'closed texts' that preserve the goal of entertaining a mass audience by processing effectively any challenge to the 'neutral and integrative function of public opinion'.[5]

And Hill's *Sex, Class and Realism*, which is undeniably thoroughgoing, judges that 'the films, and the views of the world which they promoted, may well have obscured as much as they enlightened, and obstructed as much as they initiated the potential for social change and reconstruction.'[6]

If the films have sometimes become entangled in theoretical thickets, the realist cinema of the late 1950s and early 60s is at least critically acknowledged as an important movement. Most of the rest of 60s British cinema – crime films, horror films, comedies, spy films, science-fiction, musicals, youth films, and the cycle of films associated with Swinging London – have received such cursory treatment that it is less a matter of arguing against established critical positions than of dispersing clouds of ignorance and prejudice. 'Swinging London' films, for example, have fared particularly badly. In contrast to the Kitchen Sink and social problem films, which can be assimilated into a respectable, albeit increasingly unfashionable, tradition of socially concerned realism, the Swinging London films – frivolous, ephemeral, unrealistic, extravagant – seemed to represent all that was worst about mass culture, and attracted derision and abuse from film critics.

Philip French, John Russell Taylor, Eric Rhode, David Robinson and other *Sight and Sound* luminaries laid into films as various as *Darling*, *Morgan*, *Poor Cow* and *Here We Go Round the Mulberry Bush* for hastening the decline of Western civilisation, and Penelope Houston, summing up the decade, gloomily pronounced that British cinema

'has suggested another jaded party, dragging exhaustedly on into the night in its bedraggled fancy dress surrounded by its odds and ends of boutique bric-à-brac, and deaf to the ambulance sirens coming louder up the street.'[7] Thomas Guback, examining the infusion of American capital into British films, was 'forced to wonder whether the British industry has not lost something in the trade – if it has not exchanged autonomy and the chance to manifest its own culture for the appetizing appeal of financial success with many "mid-Atlantic" productions.'[8] Yet in retrospect British films of the 60s seem at least as illuminating of the society in which they were made as those of any earlier decade. The sort of mid-Atlantic film feared by Guback (*To Sir, With Love* or *Prudence and the Pill*, for example) was, if anything, less common and less offensive than in the preceding and following decades. What upset British critics was less an invasion of American ideas and techniques than what they saw as an indigenous degeneration in film style: 'the disregard of form and structure, the visual extravagance, the devices used like purple phrases and exclamation marks in schoolgirl prose, the tourist fantasies of a colour-supplement Britain.'[9]

Barry Curtis argues that the key characteristic of 60s style was a fluidity stemming from the disordering of social hierarchies, 'a loss of "aura" hitherto relied on to mark off the "important" figures and commodities.'[10] In dealing with such a disparate body of films it is difficult to sustain generalisations: David Greene and Peter Collinson, for example, rely on tight cutting, unusual locations and a restless and intrusive camera style, techniques which rapidly became standard for mainstream, medium-budget action pictures. In Greene's 60s films, however, there is a persistent undermining of what seems to be 'reality', and Curtis' argument is borne out by the most clearly marked feature of late 60s cinema, the disruption of the narrative. Fantasy sequences (in which everything becomes possible), slapstick (in which the world collapses into chaos), outrageous visual jokes, distancing devices such as the use of a narrator, inter-titles or direct address to camera spread across films as different as *The Bliss of Mrs Blossom* and *Poor Cow*, *Here We Go Round the Mulberry Bush* and *If....*

Apart from Curtis' unpublished thesis, there has been little attempt to challenge the view handed down by the world-weary middlebrow critics of *Sight and Sound*. Even a serious film historian like Jeffrey Richards writes of Swinging London as 'an increasingly frenzied saturnalia whose cult was the new and the now'. He goes on to complain:

> Sober realism and earnest social comment gave way to fantasy, extravaganza and escapism; black-and-white photography and Northern locations to colour and the lure of the metropolis; Puritanical self-discipline to hedonistic self-indulgence; plain truthful settings to flamboyant, unrealistic decorativeness. Films became

> locked in a heady spiral of mounting extravagance, febrile excitement and faddish innovation.[11]

My own attitude to the 'Swinging Sixties' ought to be equally hostile. During 1967's 'Summer of Love' I was working as a filleter's labourer in a fish factory in Grimbsy, and when I came down to London in 1968 it might still have been swinging but, living in cheap bed-sits with building workers and kitchen porters for neighbours, I hardly noticed. Painfully aware of the discrepancy between my own experience and the colourful dream of Swinging London, I did not look forward to watching innumerable films celebrating pleasures I shared no part of. But the idea that most films between 1965 and 1970 promoted a mindlessly optimistic view of the world is more of a myth than the myth the films are assumed to convey. *Repulsion*, Roman Polanski's bleak vision of madness, came out at virtually the same time as Richard Lester's *The Knack* (January and May 1965 respectively), and many of the films associated with Swinging London (*Morgan, Blow Up, I'll Never Forget What's 'Is Name, Joanna, Sebastian, Up the Junction*) have disturbing undertones. By the end of the decade the mood was one of downbeat realism, with films like *The Strange Affair* and *The Reckoning* making grim comments on the price paid for the affluent and permissive society.

Films of the 1960s have retained a popular appeal denied to most British films: over four hundred 60s feature films have been shown on television (and dozens of B-films and shorts) over the past five years, some of them several times. There has been little attempt to chart this vast sea of films. Alan Lovell, in a 1969 paper entitled 'British Cinema: The Unknown Cinema', suggested that as British cinema boasted few outstanding *auteurs* a good way of studying it was through its genres. A start to this process was made in 1973 by Dave Pirie in his book *A Heritage of Horror*, but there has been little attempt to follow up his example. Intelligent appreciation of British horror films certainly exists – Paul Willemen's contributions to the *Aurum Encylopedia of Horror*, for example – but it remains outside the stockade of academic respectability. There is still no monograph on Terence Fisher, and the best history of Hammer is *The Little Shoppe of Horror*'s valiant, but inevitably patchy, poorly co-ordinated and difficult-to-come-by eighty-five page feature article 'Hammer: Yesterday, Today and Tomorrow'.[12] Other genres such as crime and comedy remain almost virgin territory.

Vincent Porter writes that 'No film ... can be studied without a complete understanding of the specific economic, political, industrial, generic, authorial and ideological conjuncture in which it was both produced and consumed.'[13] This commitment to total history is admirable as a guide to detailed studies of individual films, but it is hardly

possible when dealing with large numbers of films over a period of time. In practice, general film history tends to rely on what Ben Brewster calls the '100 best films approach':

> This approach assumes a process of historical selection in which the many works produced at any one time either 'die' or 'survive' to constitute a canon, which can then be written back into the chronological sequence as a series of 'innovations', 'developments' and 'advances', and linked together by 'influences'. The art form thus becomes a 'Tradition' . . .

Once established, this 'tradition' becomes self-perpetuating:

> only the films sanctioned by it are made available or even preserved at all; writing about the cinema returns again and again to the same works and historical moments, endlessly reinterpreting them, but not really displacing or reorganising them.[14]

As Steve Neale and Andrew Higson point out about the 1980s upsurge of interest in British cinema:

> while the new work has adopted much that is new in its theoretical framework and terminology, the films it tends to focus on (and the films it tends to exclude or to marginalise from its analyses) remain substantially the same . . . In other words, the work is still orientating itself by a map of British cinema drawn up many years ago.[15]

Taking the advice of Lawrence Alloway that 'The proper point of departure for a film critic . . . is an approach that accepts obsolescence and in which judgements derive from the sympathetic consumption of a great many films', I have tried to draw my own map.[16]

Alloway was writing at a time of rapid cultural change when the past, including the great mass of popular cinema, seemed in danger of being swept away as outdated ephemera. Now the problems are different, and an essential task of any general survey would seem to be to act as a guide through the backlog of films unexpectedly made permanently accessible by the evolution of television and video technology. I have tried to reconcile the clash between the demands of narrative coherence and the desire to be comprehensive by watching as many films as possible and at least mentioning all those films which for social, financial or aesthetic reasons seem important. The first two chapters try to cover the realist films of the late 50s and early 60s which seemed to promise a new dawn for creative British film-making, and Chapters Eight, Nine and Ten deal with horror, crime and comedy, the three key genres in 1960s British cinema. Chapter Three deals with

the critical debates of the early 60s and the development of a vigorous film culture, and Chapter Four examines the possibility of constructing a tradition of 'art cinema' from among British films. Chapter Five deals with the organisation of the industry, and Chapters Six and Seven try to come to terms with the post-Kitchen Sink films and the phenomenon of Swinging London.

Inevitably there are gaps and omissions. With the exceptions of Michael Powell, Joseph Losey, Alexander Mackendrick, Val Guest, Clive Donner and Terence Fisher, I have made no attempt to deal with directors as *auteurs* or to follow the careers of even key 60s actors like Albert Finney, Peter O'Toole and Michael Caine. There is also a bias against big-budget epics like *Lawrence of Arabia*, *Becket*, *Lord Jim*, *The Night of the Generals* and *The Lion in Winter*, which though technically British belong to an international, Hollywood-dominated cinema.[17]

Despite the help of the National Film Archive, there are a handful of important films which I have been unable to see. Guy Green's follow-up to *The Angry Silence*, *The Mark* (1961), with Stuart Whitman as a former sex offender trying to turn over a new leaf, and Hammer's *Never Take Sweets from a Stranger* (1960) with Felix Aylmer suspected of being a paedophile in a small Canadian town, would certainly have found a place among the social problem films, as would Dearden and Relph's *A Place to Go*, had I been able to see them. And for the same reason *The Small World of Sammy Lee* (1963, d. Ken Hughes) and *I Start Counting* (1969, d. David Greene) have been omitted from the crime film chapter. Tony Richardson's later films have also proved elusive and I have had to rely on received opinion for my account of *Mademoiselle*, *The Sailor from Gibraltar*, *Laughter in the Dark* and *Ned Kelly*; though personally I am more disappointed at not having been able to catch up with *Gonks Go Beat*, *Secrets of a Windmill Girl* and *The Viking Queen*.

Certain genres – costume films and war films – begin to look rather mangy in the 1960s. *Tom Jones* did revive the bawdy tradition of *The Wicked Lady* and *The Man in Grey*, but with its bright young stars, Albert Finney and Susannah York, it was also very much a contemporary film, and follow-ups like *The Amorous Adventures of Moll Flanders* and *Lock Up Your Daughters* were commercially and artistically less successful. The visually impressive (and very costly) costume films of the later 60s – *Far from the Madding Crowd*, *Where's Jack?*, *Alfred the Great*, *Cromwell* and *Ryan's Daughter* – have some economic importance in hastening the departure of the Americans and they have received more attention here than early 60s films like Peter Ustinov's *Billy Budd* and Lewis Gilbert's *HMS Defiant*, which in thematic terms are almost as interesting. War films, tremendously important in the 50s, are of decreasing interest after 1958. It is certainly possible to trace a development from the disillusioned realism of late 50s films like *Orders*

to Kill, *Yesterday's Enemy* and *The Long and the Short and the Tall*, through belated attempts at war heroics in *The War Lover*, *The Guns of Navarone*, *Operation Crossbow*, *633 Squadron*, *Mosquito Squadron*, *The Heroes of Telemark* and *Where Eagles Dare*, to the vociferous anti-war films of the late 60s – *How I Won the War*, *The Charge of the Light Brigade* and *Oh What a Lovely War!* But apart from Peter Collinson's *The Long Day's Dying*, the two most complex and interesting war films of the decade – *The Blue Max* and *The Night of the Generals* – are, despite their British registration, essentially American films, and gain their originality by looking at the First and Second World Wars from a German perspective.

With so many films being financed by American companies in the 60s it is not always easy to recognise a 'British' film. I have taken Denis Gifford's *The British Film Catalogue 1895–1985* – which relies on the Board of Trade's definition of whether or not a particular film is eligible for the British film quota – to be the authoritative arbiter on this matter. But where a Hollywood film, like William Wyler's *The Collector*, is partly shot in England, uses British actors and appears to deal with themes which are integral to British society, I have included it at the expense of films like *The Sundowners* and *The Dirty Dozen* which are British only because British technicians worked on them. Films made by British directors in Hollywood such as Peter Yates's *Bullitt*, John Boorman's *Point Blank* and John Schlesinger's *Midnight Cowboy*, important though they are in terms of international cinema, seem irrelevant here, though along with Richard Lester's *Petulia* (which is technically British despite its American director, setting and finance) they might be taken as indicators of the shift in creative energy back from England to Hollywood.

I have tried to acknowledge craftsmanship where it becomes a dominant element in the film. Arthur Grant's cinematography on Val Guest's location thrillers and Hammer's horror films is so important that it can scarcely be ignored, and Walter Lassally makes a similarly significant contribution to *A Taste of Honey*, *The Loneliness of the Long Distance Runner*, *Tom Jones* and *Joanna*. Alex Vetchinsky's art direction adds an extra dimension to *Flame in the Streets* and *Life for Ruth* and even seems to liven up those *Carry On* films he worked on, and Ken Adam's collaboration on the Bond films is generally acknowledged to have been crucial in ensuring their success. But comprehensiveness would leave little room for anything other than a detailed list of films and an endless cataloguing of the contributions made by the various people who worked on them. Giving actors their due is even more of a problem. The 60s were unique in producing an array of British actors who became internationally popular – Albert Finney, Michael Caine, Peter Sellers, Terence Stamp, Julie Christie, Vanessa Redgrave, Peter O'Toole, Richard Harris – but here I have found little

Sinister husbands, scheming wives. Dudley Foster and Maxine Audley, *Never Mention Murder*

space to comment on their performances. Character actors have been similarly taken for granted, though the odd, slightly sinister men played by Dudley Foster or Jeremy Kemp and the scheming *femmes fatales* and faithless wives portrayed by Barbara Shelley, Maxine Audley, Moira Redmond and Adrienne Corri bring to life even the dullest films.

The 1960s is a very well-documented decade. Christopher Booker's *The Neophiliacs* and Bernard Levin's *The Pendulum Years*, for all their reliance on *Old Moore's Almanac* for philosophical inspiration, are full of insight and inside information on British or at least London society in the 60s. George Melly's *Revolt into Style* and Jeff Nuttall's *Bomb Culture* approximate much more to my own view of the 60s, though for the purposes of general information they are less useful than Booker or Levin. Robert Hewison's *Too Much*, like his two earlier volumes on the history of post-war British culture, is difficult to digest but absolutely invaluable as a summary of the important cultural trends of the period. For the films themselves, Raymond Durgnat's *A Mirror for England* tries to limit itself to the heyday of British middle-class cinema between 1945 and 1958 but frequently strays beyond those borders and is an essential guide to the highways and byways of British cinema. John Hill's *Sex, Class and Realism* looks at the Kitchen Sink and social problem films of the late 50s and early 60s, and though his

Marxist perspective leads him to condemn their well-meaning liberalism as ideologically pernicious, Hill's analysis of the films remains open-minded and perceptive. The 60s film industry is well-covered from an economic history point of view: John Spraos's *The Decline of the Cinema* and Terence Kelly's *A Competitive Cinema* are dry but valuable accounts of the main economic developments in the first half of the decade, and Alexander Walker's *Hollywood, England* covers the key story of the later 60s – the American takeover of British film production – in illuminating detail. Walker leans too heavily on the apocalyptic framework of Booker's *The Neophiliacs*, but he interviewed the leading figures in the 60s film industry when events were still fresh in their minds (the book was first published in 1974) and he pieces together the story of America's brief but spectacular take-over of the British film industry with clarity and precision. I have refrained from trying to tell the same story, and my chapter on 'Hollywood's England' merely attempts to show which American companies made what films and whether some were more successful than others in the choices they made.

All dates for films are release rather than production dates and are taken from Denis Gifford's *The British Film Catalogue*. Except when a film is to be dealt with in more detail later, dates are included alongside the film when it is first mentioned.

1
A SAVAGE STORY OF LUST AND AMBITION

> Though, as always, there were long thin tendrils, reaching to the war, reaching to the Movement, reaching to the slow rise of living standards and the abolition of rationing in the earlier fifties, reaching to the crisis of Suez, the critical point of change, as near as one can ever get to these things, hinges on the year 1959. (Arthur Marwick, *Journal of Contemporary History*, 1984)[1]

Stagnant Cinema

British cinema of the 1950s has a reputation for stagnant complacency which is not entirely undeserved. The war films are solid and serious, the comedies funny, and the substratum of crime and horror B movies a treasure trove of cinematic delights; but as Lindsay Anderson complained in 1957:

> To counterbalance the rather tepid humanism of our cinema, it must also be said that it is snobbish, anti-intelligent, emotionally inhibited, wilfully blind to the conditions and problems of the present, dedicated to an out-of-date, exhausted national ideal.[2]

It is easy to sympathise with Anderson's anger and frustration. He had helped launch *Sequence*, a lively, adventurous film journal, in 1947 when there were still legitimate expectations that British cinema would become internationally significant, expectations that were firmly squashed two years later when the Rank Organisation abandoned its attempt to crack the American market and concentrated its resources on safe, innocuous films at Pinewood. Entry into the industry as a director was difficult, particularly for an intellectual like Anderson. Apart from the little band of liberals and ex-documentary film-makers who sheltered under the umbrella of John Baxter and John Grierson's

Group Three, most of the directors who made their breakthrough between 1950 and 1959 were pragmatically commercial and had generally served a long apprenticeship in other branches of the industry.[3] Anderson, along with two other young, ambitious film-makers he became associated with – Karel Reisz and Tony Richardson – was too uncompromising to fit into the cosily conformist environs of Elstree, Ealing and Pinewood and too highbrow to seek a career in the film factories of Twickenham, Bray and Merton Park.[4]

In February 1956, Anderson, Reisz and Richardson launched Free Cinema. Between 1956 and 1959 six programmes of films were shown under the Free Cinema banner at the National Film Theatre, three of them remarkably prescient examples of 'New Wave' film-making in Poland, France and the United States, three made up of low-budget films made in Britain. All the British films, except for Lorenza Mazzetti's *Together*, were documentaries, but documentaries different in spirit, technique and context from the mainstream of British documentary. Free Cinema was accepted as a movement because, despite their disparity, most of the film-makers involved shared a common outlook and common interests. As Alan Lovell argues:

> ... the views of the world which emerge from Free Cinema films are recognisable, the result of preoccupations common among intellectuals in the second half of the 1950s. Broadly, these preoccupations were: a sympathetic interest in communities, whether they were the traditional industrial one of *Wakefield Express* or the new, improvised one of the jazz club in *Momma Don't Allow*; fascination with the newly emerging youth culture (*Momma Don't Allow*, *We Are the Lambeth Boys*, *Nice Time*); unease about the quality of leisure in an urban society (*Nice Time*, *O Dreamland*); and respect for the traditional working class (*Enginemen*, *Every Day Except Christmas*).[5]

Anderson's Free Cinema manifesto, the film programmes, and the articles written by Karel Reisz and other members of the Free Cinema group (such as the cameraman Walter Lassally) created considerable media interest, but their intellectual preoccupations had not yet permeated the film business and doors into the commercial film industry remained jealously closed. Ironically, the breakthrough into a new kind of cinema came from within.

Room at the Top

John and James Woolf, the producers, and Jack Clayton, the director of *Room at the Top*, were not the sort of people one would envisage starting a cinematic revolution. Clayton had served a traditional apprenticeship in the commercial cinema, beginning as a tea-boy at

Denham studios in 1936, rising to become an editor and then a producer, and proving his ability to direct with a short fiction film, *The Bespoke Overcoat*, in 1955. The Woolf brothers were the sons of C. M. Woolf, a key figure of the pre-war film industry. He died in 1942, leaving his sons financially well-endowed but with the family firm, General Film Distributors, tightly ensconced within the Rank empire (GFD's symbol was a muscle-man striking a gong). John Woolf worked for Rank when he came out of the army, but was less than happy as an organisation man and left in 1948 to join his brother in setting up their own distribution and production company.[6]

In contrast to the increasingly staid and conventional Rank Organisation, the Woolfs were prepared to take risks. The investigations of the House of Representatives Un-American Activities Committee had made it difficult, unpleasant or impossible for left-wing film-makers to continue working in Hollywood. Britain, though not immune from its own anti-Communist hysterics, provided a more congenial climate. In 1950 the Woolfs brought over Ava Gardner, James Mason and Albert Lewin to make the wildly exotic *Pandora and the Flying Dutchman*, and despite its disappointing box-office performance, persisted with their experiment in Anglo-American production and scored a big success with *The African Queen*. Several more Anglo-American co-productions followed. By the mid-50s the Woolfs were financially secure enough to bail out Sir Alexander Korda and help him set up his last four films – *A Kid for Two Farthings*, *Richard III*, *Summer Madness* and *Storm Over the Nile* – prestige British films which turned out to be uncharacteristically profitable.

What distinguished the Woolfs from other entrepreneurial partnerships was their combination of financial acumen with artistic flair. John Woolf, born and brought up in the film industry and married to the daughter of producer/director Victor Saville, had strong views about what sort of films he wanted to make as well as a canny perception of what would be commercially successful. But it was James, despite his shyness and poor health, who inherited Korda's ability to recognise and foster talent.[7] Among his protégés was the Lithuanian-born actor Lauruska Mischa Skikne, better known as Laurence Harvey. Harvey's biggest film part had been as the vaguely asexual hero of *I Am a Camera* (1955), an adaptation of Christopher Isherwood's Berlin stories (which would later be re-made as *Cabaret*). Despite his reputation as 'an exotic butterfly', the Woolfs cast him as the working-class hero of *Room at the Top*.[8]

John Braine's novel *Room at the Top*, published in 1957, was a best-seller. It combined the realism of situation, character and setting of earlier 50s novels like John Wain's *Hurry On Down* and Kingsley Amis's *Lucky Jim* with the bitterness and aggression of John Osborne's play *Look Back in Anger*. Braine's hero is working-class but he has had

a grammar school education and he works in the Borough Treasurer's office, and as Braine pointed out:

> Most ambitious working-class boys want to get to hell out of the working class. That was a simple truth that had never been stated before. The English working classes are the least politically-minded in the world; they always have been. Give the English working-class man half a chance and he becomes a bourgeois.[9]

Such a viewpoint chimed well with 'never had it so good' attitudes in the late 50s, and the novel was serialised in the *Daily Express*.[10] But the book was no complacent celebration of affluence: its story of a young man who uses his charm and good looks to gain advancement in a class-bound society expressed the resentment of that first generation of working-class children to benefit from the 1944 Education Act, when they emerged into a world far removed from the classless, populist utopia they had been promised.

Joe Lampton moves from the grim northern industrial town of Dufton to take up a job in the much cleaner and more prosperous town of Warnley. He joins an amateur dramatics society and resolves to win the hand of fellow thespian Susan Brown, the pretty daughter of a local industrialist, partly because he is genuinely attracted to her, partly because he sees her as a passport to a better way of life. Though he makes some slow progress towards his goal, he also drifts into a fulfilling love affair with an older woman, Alice Aisgill. Ironically, the social pressures which make his relationship with Susan seem impossible conspire, after he has realised his destiny lies with Alice, in forcing him into marriage with Susan. Alice commits suicide and Joe looks forward to a loveless marriage for which material rewards and a promising career seem insufficient compensations.

Unlike literary predecessors such as Julian Sorel in Stendhal's *Le Rouge et le Noir* or Clyde Griffiths in Dreiser's *An American Tragedy*, whose refusal to accept their humble situation in society provokes bloody retribution by the forces of order, Joe Lampton is congratulated on his success. In 1950s British society his ambitions – a sports car, a glamorous girlfriend, a job with an expense account – are reasonable and legitimate, but *Room at the Top* implies that they are realisable at a high cost in honesty and integrity. Alexander Walker complains that 'what one feels most strongly in *Room at the Top* isn't anger –but envy – the envy of a have-not for what he wants to acquire.'[11] This is misleading. Braine is very specific about Joe's attitude: 'I tasted the sourness of envy. Then I rejected it. Not on moral grounds, but because I felt then, and still do, that envy's a small and squalid vice . . . This didn't abate the fierceness of my longing. I wanted an Aston-Martin, I wanted a three-guinea linen shirt, I wanted a girl with a

A fulfilling love affair with an older woman: Simone Signoret and Laurence Harvey, *Room at the Top*

Riviera suntan – these were my rights, I felt, a signed and sealed legacy.'[12] Joe has a sense of his own value which makes envy irrelevant, and in the film the casting of Laurence Harvey – a prince very thinly disguised as a frog – reinforced the feeling that Joe has a right to the good things in life.

John Braine – a Bradford librarian – identifies with his hero, but he maintains a certain critical distance. In the film, this disappears. Implicit approval is given to Joe's transgression of class boundaries: his aunt and uncle in Dufton who warn him of the dangers of not sticking to his own kind seem like relics from a past age, and the upper-crust characters – Alice's husband, Susan's mother and her chinless wonder of a boyfriend – who are vaguely unpleasant in the book, assume a nightmarish awfulness.[13] The film's morality is tied up in the relationship Joe forms with Alice Aisgill. In the novel the reader is invited to share Joe's reservations about his ageing lover and his attraction to the young and desirable Susan, but by making Alice a foreigner the filmmakers put her outside the English class system and change her into a symbol of honesty and true love.[14] It is not second thoughts on Joe's part but external circumstances which make him break off the relationship: Alice's husband refuses to divorce her and threatens to lose Joe his job; Susan gets pregnant and her father makes Joe an offer he cannot refuse. Alice dies, horribly, and Joe is congratulated on achieving his ambitions, his tears on his wedding day mistaken by his young

wife for tears of happiness. A radical novel flawed by cynicism and sentimentality is transformed into a film which displays the tragedy of a man stuck in a rigid hierarchical society where ambition and enterprise are turned into self-destructive weapons.

The sexual element is much stronger in the film than in the book. Clayton inserts no extra sex scenes, but they are shot with a frankness and sensuality unusual enough in British cinema at the time for the British Board of Film Censors to saddle the film with an 'X'certificate. The X category had originally been introduced in 1951 as a means of allowing films unsuitable for children to be seen by discerning adults, but it had very quickly acquired an aura of disreputability and the Secretary of the BBFC, John Trevelyan, saw *Room at the Top* as an ideal opportunity to re-establish its respectability.

Romulus had made X films before (*Cosh Boy*, *I Am a Camera*), but for a 'quality' film like *Room at the Top*, the X certificate could be a considerable handicap. As Rank and ABC, the two major circuits, only rarely gave playing time to X films they tended to be confined to the more down-market cinemas. The Woolfs, who believed in the Hollywood practice of sneak previews, tried the film out in the Bruce Grove Cinema at Tottenham, a rough area of north London, substituting it for either *Dracula* or *The Curse of Frankenstein* in a typical X-rated double bill. The audience reacted with scorn and derision and the Woolfs began to think they had a commercial disaster on their hands. As the big circuits were wary of taking the film, it was opened at Paramount's West End showcase, the Plaza in Lower Regent Street. Critical reaction was by no means universally favourable, but there was general agreement on the film's sincerity, and Frank Jackson in *Reynolds' News* endorsed Trevelyan's attempt to rehabilitate the X certificate, welcoming 'At long last a British film which is truly adult. *Room at the Top* has an X certificate and deserves it – not for any cheap sensationalism but because it is an unblushingly frank portrayal of intimate human relationships.'[15] John Woolf, still unconvinced that the film would reach a 'quality' audience, advertised it as 'a savage story of lust and ambition', but at the end of 1959 *Room at the Top* emerged as the fourth most popular film of the year (behind *Carry On Nurse*, *I'm All Right Jack* and *The Inn of the Sixth Happiness*) and was acclaimed around the world as the harbinger of a new British cinema.[16] There was going to be no massive infusion of new blood, but cracks were beginning to appear in the British film industry's facade of bland conformity.

Life at the Kitchen Sink

Tony Richardson had begun his career as a television director with the BBC in the early 50s. He left to make *Momma Don't Allow* with Karel Reisz in 1955 and then, seeing no openings in the film industry, joined

George Devine in setting up the English Stage Company at the Royal Court. If the British film industry in the mid-50s was uninvitingly stagnant, the stage, where Terence Rattigan was regarded as Britain's best dramatist and Sandy Wilson's nostalgic musicals were seen as excitingly original, was even more of a backwater. As Kenneth Tynan put it in 1954: 'The bare fact is that apart from revivals and imports there is nothing in the London theatre that one dares discuss with an intelligent man for more than five minutes.'[17] In this context Richardson's production of John Osborne's *Look Back in Anger* in May 1956 had the effect of a bombshell, and Richardson determined to use the play as a Trojan horse to get himself and his Free Cinema collaborators into the film industry.[18] With John Osborne and the experienced American producer Harry Saltzman, he formed a production company, Woodfall; and when Richard Burton expressed a desire to play Jimmy Porter, Warner Brothers agreed to finance a film version of *Look Back in Anger*.[19]

Along with fictional precursors like John Wain's Charles Lumley and Kingsley Amis's Jim Dixon and real-life contemporaries such as the self-taught philosopher Colin Wilson, Jimmy Porter and his creator were taken to represent a new type – the Angry Young Man. But by 1959, when the film of *Look Back in Anger* was released, Wilson had fallen from favour, Amis, Wain and Osborne were tucking in to the fruits of fame, and Angry Young Men no longer seemed so significant. Thus changes wrought on the play by a commercially nervous film industry – established stars, greater emphasis on sex and less on politics, insistence on conventional studio film-making under the control of an experienced lighting cameraman – were less harmful than they might have been.

As a director's first film, *Look Back in Anger* is less assured and accomplished than *Room at the Top*, but the comparison is not entirely fair. Whereas Jack Clayton is a meticulous craftsman whose infrequent films are highly polished and complete, Richardson has an impatient disregard for technical standards:

> the whole tone of the picture business is to strive for technical perfection, but we all know this doesn't matter a tiny damn – the thing can be appalling in many ways technically and yet still be a wonderful and marvellous film. Gloss guarantees nothing ... whereas the cost of technical perfection hampers the industry.[20]

It is not surprising, then, that Richardson's films rarely achieve a harmonious artistic unity, but his constant willingness to experiment deserves more credit than it generally receives. Apart from a few bravura touches at the beginning, *Look Back in Anger* is surprisingly disciplined, and with the help of Oswald Morris's sensitive studio

photography Richardson evokes a bed-sitter world where it is always Sunday and always raining. The new characters introduced to open out the play – a lacklustre Indian underwear salesman and a fruity old Cockney played by Edith Evans – seem irrelevant, but they function as outlets for Jimmy's political and social conscience, allowing Richardson to cut his tirades and concentrate attention on the relationship between Jimmy and Alison: a battlefield of selfishness, indulgence, immaturity, passion and boredom. One can regret that in comparison with, say, *Brief Encounter* (which is remarkably close to *Look Back in Anger* in its claustrophobic intensity) passion is reduced from something that lights up the world or casts it into deep shadow to a weary game of make-believe, but the change encompasses an impatient dismissal of the static, repressed, over-civilised world of the upper-middle classes. As the American critic Stanley Kauffman argued: 'To be stripped of the earthly and cosmic certainties of the past is to be lonely indeed, but it is also to be free of illusions ... If there is no longer a comfy old world, there is room to make another. If there is no God, there is still man.'[21]

One does, briefly, glimpse a kitchen sink in *Look Back in Anger*, but the film has little to do with either the working class or with the realist tradition in British cinema. That Osborne was not a working-class realist writer was confirmed by his second play, *The Entertainer*, filmed by Richardson in 1960. Laurence Olivier's performance as the down-at-heel music hall comedian Archie Rice turned the play into a big success, but it was a difficult subject to film. Osborne draws parallels between the state of Britain, on its last legs as an imperial power after the Suez debacle, and that of the music hall, declining into a decrepitude of girly shows and TV spin-offs, but these parallels were easier to maintain in the theatre than in the cinema – particularly in the realistically inclined cinema of Tony Richardson.

Much of the film was shot on location (at the Lancashire seaside town of Morecambe), but Archie and his ill-matched family look as if they have been retrieved from the baggage of a pre-war touring theatre company and are oddly out of place among the fresh air and fun. The exception is Archie's father, Billy Rice, a music hall performer of the old school who copes with the humiliations and disappointments of old age secure in the knowledge that he lived life to the full when he had the chance. In the play he is a sympathetic but insignificant old wreck, living in a dream world of nostalgia for the Good Old Days of the music hall's heyday. As played by Roger Livesey, he becomes a much more significant figure. Livesey, himself the son of an old character actor, had almost twenty years earlier made his mark in *The Life and Death of Colonel Blimp*, progressing in the space of the film's 163 minutes from dashing young subaltern to the walrus-like old gentleman made famous by David Low's cartoons. By 1960 he didn't need to

age himself and it is his presence, inadvertently dominating the squabbling household, which brings the film to life. His rendering of the ridiculously jingoistic 'Don't Let Them Scrap the British Navy' is moving rather than embarrassing, but it fatally unbalances the film, making Archie's moment of truth, his memory of an 'old fat negress getting up to sing about Jesus or something', look like sentimental twaddle. Billy's death in the wings of the theatre minutes before a comeback intended to rescue his rascally son from bankruptcy effectively closes the film, and one shares the disappointment and frustration of the theatre audience as they slowly file out while Archie does his 'the show must go on' routine.

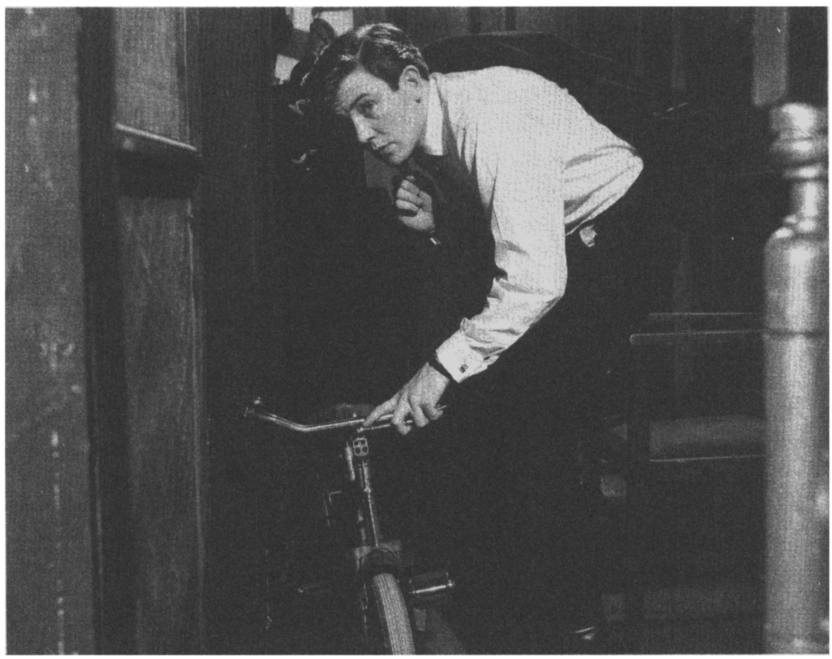
With nothing equivalent to Richard Burton's box-office appeal and the 'sex angle' of *Look Back in Anger*, *The Entertainer* faced a hostile reception from the film trade. There were delays in releasing the film, and support from the critics was too lukewarm to boost audiences when the film was shown. With Woodfall's fortunes at a low ebb, Richardson shelved his ideas of directing Shelagh Delaney's *A Taste of Honey* and Colin MacInnes's *City of Spades* and accepted an offer from 20th Century-Fox to make a film in Hollywood (an adaptation of William Faulkner's *Sanctuary*). Karel Reisz was brought in to direct *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning* on a budget of £117,000, little more than half that of *The Entertainer* and *Look Back in Anger*.[22]

The novel, by Alan Sillitoe, had been a success and aroused considerable interest in left-wing circles, but it was not considered to have the same popular appeal as *Room at the Top*.[23] One producer, Joseph Janni, had already tried and failed to find a financial backer, but Michael Balcon's Bryanston consortium was anxious to encourage new blood and agreed to put up the money for Woodfall. The low budget had no ill effects on the look of the film (though the six-week shooting schedule was so tight that Reisz had to go to bed for a week to recover from his exertions), the main saving being on the cast.[24] Only Shirley Ann Field, who had appeared in a number of starlet roles and as the stage-struck beauty queen seduced by Archie in *The Entertainer*, could be considered an established film actress. Albert Finney had made his debut in *The Entertainer*, but in a small part memorable only in retrospect and he was best known for his Shakespearean acting and his West End success as Billy Liar. Rachel Roberts had played several minor film roles but she too was better known for her stage work, and many of the other actors – Bryan Pringle, Colin Blakely, Hylda Baker – were making their film debuts.

The film opens with the sort of sequence one might expect from a documentary-maker with an interest in the working class. In a busy, noisy factory a worker toiling at his lathe expresses his attitude to work and the world at large. But in contrast to the patronising bonhomie of the orthodox documentary, this worker expresses attitudes which are a

deliberate affront to middle-class sensibilities: 'No use working every minute God sends, that's my motto. Don't let the bastards grind you down. That's one thing I've learned . . . I'd like to see anybody try to grind me down. That'd be the day. What I want is a good time. All the rest is propaganda.' Karel Reisz had come to England from Czechoslovakia as a teenager in the 1930s. As a middle-class, mid-European Jew he had little in common with Arthur Seaton the bolshie Nottingham factory worker, and he later confessed he had little sympathy for him: 'In a metaphorical way Arthur embodied what was happening in England: he was a sad person, terribly limited in his sensibilities, narrow in his ambitions and a bloody fool into the bargain, by no means a standard-bearer for any ideas of mine.'[25] But Reisz's detachment, his position outside the English class system, allowed him to give objective expression to a voice hitherto unheard in British cinema. As Alan Lovell acutely points out:

> Karel Reisz gets his main effect from the style he uses. It's almost an anti-style. The camera does only enough work to tell the story as simply and directly as possible. Because of this the audience is encouraged to make judgments for itself. Just how important this is has gone unnoticed. Very few contemporary films, whatever their quality, leave their audience alone. Nearly every director, either



A young rebel twisting and turning in the trap of dead-end working-class life: Albert Finney, *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning*

> serious or hack, tries to bludgeon his audience by his technical skill or his dramatic talents. Because of their uncertainty about their relationship with the audience, directors seem constantly to be saying 'Look I'm here and I'm good'. Very few film-makers have enough confidence in the audience just to assume their co-operation. Karel Reisz does just this.[26]

The analytical approach evident in his book *The Technique of Film Editing* (and the fact that he was able to call on the services of Seth Holt to edit the film) stood him in good stead. But unlike Richardson, who had to work with two idiosyncratic, stylised stage plays, Reisz had a good script from a very filmic novel to work from.

Alan Sillitoe shared characteristics with writers like John Braine, Stan Barstow, Keith Waterhouse and David Storey, all of whom came from the north of England, all of whom wrote about working-class characters. But Sillitoe had been pensioned out of the RAF with tuberculosis at the age of twenty-two, and rather than return to the damp slums of Nottingham where he was born, he eked out his pension in the warmer (and cheaper) climes of France and Spain. There he learnt French, Spanish and Catalan and tried to be a writer. *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning* was begun under an orange tree in Majorca in 1955, and Sillitoe's literary mentors were J. D. Salinger and Norman Mailer rather than Kingsley Amis and John Wain.[27] He had originally intended to write short stories rather than a novel, and *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning* is primarily a series of episodes built round the character of Arthur Seaton, a young rebel twisting and turning in the trap of dead-end working-class life. Unlike Joe Lampton, who aspires to the middle class, or Jimmy Porter, cut off from his working-class roots by his university education, Arthur's way out is not into another class but in an arrogant refusal to surrender his individual identity:

> What am I? he wondered. A six-foot pit prop that wants a pint of ale. That's what I am. And if any knowing bastard says that's what I am, I'm a dynamite dealer, sten-gun seller, hundred-ton tank trader, a capstan-lathe operator waiting to blow the Army to Kingdom Cum. I'm me and nobody else; and whatever people think I am or say I am, that's what I'm not, because they don't know a bloody thing about me.[28]

In the book, and as played by Albert Finney in the film, Arthur escapes any attempt to pity him or to moralise about him.

The film ends with Arthur and Doreen, the young woman he has agreed to settle down with, walking in the fields outside the city which are being encroached upon by new housing estates. Arthur throws stones at the houses and when reproved by Doreen tells her that it

won't be the last stone he throws. To Reisz, this was a downbeat ending showing the inevitability of Arthur being tamed by the system. But Sillitoe had a more positive interpretation:

> These last scenes stamp Arthur as having changed from when we first saw him at the beginning of the film; yet they also show him to be basically the same person, to the extent that he is still going to be someone with a mind of his own, a mind that can't be so easily got at as most people's seem to be. It is also obvious that for him, life is just beginning.[29]

Despite favourable advance publicity and optimism from publishers – Pan launched a paperback edition before the film was released, hoping to sell 250,000 copies – the film trade was as hostile to *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning* as they had been to *The Entertainer*.[30] Fortunately, when the film did secure a West End release, the critics recognised it as a landmark in British cinema. Even 'old squares' like Fred Majdalany in the *Daily Mail*, while deploring the film's morality, acknowledged its significance, and audiences flocked to see it. In its three-week run round the London circuit cinemas *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning* became the first film to take in more than £100,000, outgrossing even the lavishly promoted *Hercules Unchained*.[31] Woodfall was at last financially secure and Richardson was able to fulfil his desire to make *A Taste of Honey* as an all-location film.

In financial terms Woodfall was a conventional film production company operating within the commercial network of the industry, but Richardson was not content to make films in the conventional way. In particular he disliked the artificiality of making films in studios. He told Colin Young in 1960:

> I hate studios. I no longer want to shoot even interiors in a studio, I would rather work in the limited conditions which a location imposes upon you. For the sort of realistic films I want to make, by improvising one's way out of the impossibilities of real conditions you get something on the screen that is more true, somehow, than something contrived on a set ... once inside a studio you start taking walls out, you start thinking 'wouldn't it be fun if we tracked from here to there, pan round there?' – and you know, do a lot of fancy stuff. One is getting in fact less of the human reality.[32]

The Entertainer and *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning* had been partly shot on location but they were still studio-based and he was determined that *A Taste of Honey* would be made entirely on location. According to the cameraman Walter Lassally, this had special advantages to a maverick like Richardson:

On location in Manchester: *A Taste of Honey*

> By not being based on a major studio we were able to hand-pick our crew, particularly the electricians, carpenters and grips, and thus got not a smaller, but a much more enthusiastic group of colleagues together, whilst still complying faithfully with union minimum crew requirements.[33]

Lassally was the cameraman on Anderson, Reisz and Richardson's Free Cinema films and was respected in Europe for his three films with the Greek Cypriot director Michael Cacoyannis – *A Girl in Black*, *A Matter of Dignity* and *Electra*. But in Britain he was vetoed from *Look Back in Anger* and *The Entertainer* and was only able to find work on 'B' films like Edmond T. Gréville's *Beat Girl*. *A Taste of Honey* was as important to him as it was to Richardson, and their collaboration proved extremely fruitful.

Much more than the other films made by Richardson, Reisz and Anderson, *A Taste of Honey* inherits the 'poetic realism' of Free Cinema: its playground-game theme music echoes *The Singing Street*, its excursion to a seaside amusement parlour *O Dreamland*, its affection for gloomy slumland streets *Together*, and its young lovers are not far removed from the working-class youth of *Momma Don't Allow* and *We Are the Lambeth Boys*. As Lassally points out, despite its grim setting and unhappy ending it is 'above all a romantic and lyrical

film'.[34] Back in 1959 Richardson, exposing 'The Man behind the Angry Young Man', asserted that 'There is a general conception that entertainment is escape, a sweet sentimental dream remote from any sense of reality. There is a definite resistance in both the cinema and the theatre to the "sordid". It's the easiest dirty label that conservative opinion has always used.'[35] *A Taste of Honey* was Richardson's first venture into the industrial slumland of the North, but there is little of the anger and disgust of the earlier Kitchen Sink films. Jo, the heroine (Rita Tushingham), is a schoolgirl and the soundtrack is haunted by children's songs; her pregnancy is accepted as the casual consequence of a childish romance, and her subsequent relationship with a young homosexual results in sadness and compromise but not tragedy.

A Taste of Honey was a commercial success, and with Lassally and the same team of technicians Richardson turned to Sillitoe's short story *The Loneliness of the Long Distance Runner*. Filmed with the sort of boisterous gimmickry which Richardson was to take even further in *Tom Jones*, the film attracted almost universal condemnation for what were considered excessive and inappropriate borrowings from the French *nouvelle vague*. The *Monthly Film Bulletin* complained of its 'restless trickery' and expressed a 'reactionary longing ... for some solid, dramatic meat of the most old-fashioned kind.'[36] And *Sight and Sound*, in a full-scale assault on the film, insisted that: 'Instead of subtly evoking a minutely personal yet symptomatic state of mind, the film's vision has been narrowed to an examination of a social situation, and to the offering of an analysis which rings disquietingly false.'[37] Attacks on Richardson were sometimes coupled with querulous protests at the sympathy extended to working-class youths with no sense of their responsibilities, and complaints that the Kitchen Sink films 'succeeded in presenting us less with the unique quality of individual life than with the broad general outlines of sociological types.'[38]

The reception of *The Loneliness of the Long Distance Runner* marks a critical turning away from realism, though ironically, in style if not in content, the film can be seen as the first of the 'Swinging Sixties' films. It is by no means an unflawed masterpiece, and there is some justification for critical irritation with whirling tree-top shots, heavy-handed montage sequences and an over-insistent score. But some of Lassally and Richardson's experiments are wonderfully effective – Colin's early morning run across the horizon from the dying moon in one corner of the frame to the rising sun in the other; the dissolve from Skegness beach, where Colin has spent a windswept interlude of happiness, to the waterlogged woods where he does his training; the sequence after the funeral where Colin goes through the living room to the back bedroom (the house is a pre-fab bungalow), looks at the bed on which his father died, and burns one of the pound notes his mother has given him from the compensation money as a sacrificial offering to the dead.

In Sillitoe's story Colin Smith is similar to Arthur Seaton but even more of a nihilist with his criminal's alienation from society. As developed by Tom Courtenay in the film, Colin pursues a more rational and considered rebellion. Predictably, some critics complained that Colin's character had been politicised, finding it unbelievable that a working-class youth could be capable of rational political thought.[39] In fact Courtenay's Colin was something of a portent for the future, a fictional precursor of those intelligent working-class rebels who would flirt with Trotskyism in the later 1960s and early 1970s.

The Loneliness of the Long Distance Runner shares with *A Taste of Honey* a casualness which enables it to deal with emotive subjects without becoming sentimental, and an array of vital, idiosyncratic characters. Courtenay's performance was praised in even the most hostile reviews, but the supporting characters – who have hardly any independent existence in Sillitoe's story – are also vividly brought to life. The film's strength, though, comes not from virtuoso performances but from its authenticity and emotional honesty. Thus the Borstal and its inhabitants – the dim shed where the lads stand in line dismantling gas masks, the caricature of a governor and of the new type of 'progressive' prison officer – capture the aura of criminal autobiographies like Mark Benney's *Low Life* and Frank Norman's *Bang to Rights*.[40] The cramped home presided over by Avis Bunnage's tough working-class mum – as determined as Arthur Seaton not to be 'ground down' and as hostile as her son to the police and the bosses – has an untidiness which reflects Colin's disregard of the material world.[41] The scenes with the girls – the casual pick-up in the stolen Ford Prefect, the trip to Skegness with James Bolam pairing off with bubbly, blonde Julia Foster, while Colin makes the best of the moody, cautious girl played by Topsy Jane – are exemplary in concisely sketching out situations and relationships which give depth and subtlety to Colin's character.[42]

Raymond Durgnat, in one of the few sympathetic assessments of Richardson's work, argues that, like Shakespeare and Dickens, Richardson 'works on the "fruit cake" principle of piling into every context as many dense, lyrical, chunky, nourishing details as he can. Perhaps his basic artistic problem is an emotional, impetuous (as contrasted to a cold, closed) dogmatism: he wants to combine simple social messages with a wealth of dramatic complexity.'[43] If one accepts this viewpoint, a film like *A Taste of Honey* which does form a harmonious whole is an accidental fluke and untypical of Richardson's flawed but interesting films. What *The Loneliness of the Long Distance Runner* does share with Richardson's other films is a sincerity which commands respect.

Dreams of Leaving

A Kind of Loving, the other crucially important film in the Kitchen Sink series, was as different as the Woodfall films from the output of the mainstream industry. But as with *Room at the Top*, the production company responsible for it was a thoroughly commercial set-up. The producer, Joseph Janni, an Italian who came to Britain before the war, had been responsible for a mixed bunch of interesting films and, like the Woolfs, he was quick to see the potential of the New Wave writers.[44] He had acquired an option on *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning*, but after failing to find a financial backer had been forced to relinquish it to Woodfall. Fearing that the same thing would happen with *A Kind of Loving*, he turned to a small but dynamic production/distribution company, Anglo Amalgamated, run by two shrewd Jewish businessmen, Nat Cohen and Stuart Levy. Most of Anglo Amalgamated's own productions were low-budget crime thrillers and comedies (they had initiated the *Carry On* series) but they were prepared to take risks occasionally and Janni was able to convince them that money could be made from Kitchen Sink realism. John Schlesinger, the director chosen by Janni, was not unlike Richardson and Anderson in background and interests. He had made low-budget films while at Cambridge, acquired a reputation for inventiveness as a television director, and directed a prize-winning documentary about Waterloo railway station, *Terminus*. But he had also worked as Basil Dearden's assistant on the television film series *The Four Just Men* and seemed more safely conventional than the Free Cinema directors.

A Kind of Loving is the most realistic, least melodramatic of the Kitchen Sink films. In contrast to the aggressive male heroes of *Look Back in Anger*, *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning* and *This Sporting Life*, and the social misfits of *A Taste of Honey* and *The Loneliness of the Long Distance Runner*, the hero and heroine of *A Kind of Loving* are almost painfully ordinary. Vic (Alan Bates) and Ingrid (June Ritchie) are working-class, but they have moved into comfortable white-collar jobs and have no fundamental grudge against the world. The interest which Vic shows in high culture in Stan Barstow's novel has disappeared in the film, replaced only by a vague apprehension that there might be something better than the sort of life he seems to be heading for. The class differences which are explored are those within the working class and assume the form of domestic rows rather than tragic gestures, of petty snobberies and mixed loyalties rather than oppression and injustice. The film ends with Ingrid reluctantly giving up her ideas of a smart semi-detached home and Vic trying to overcome his dirty postcard view of women, but what is celebrated is not conformism and repression but the necessity of respect and understanding in a relationship. Their decision to try to make their marriage work – beyond the baleful eye of Ingrid's mother – seems like a