

Good of its kind? British film journalism

HALL, Sheldon <<http://orcid.org/0000-0003-0950-7310>>

Available from Sheffield Hallam University Research Archive (SHURA) at:

<http://shura.shu.ac.uk/12366/>

This document is the author deposited version. You are advised to consult the publisher's version if you wish to cite from it.

Published version

HALL, Sheldon (2017). Good of its kind? British film journalism. In: HUNTER, Ian Q., PORTER, Laraine and SMITH, Justin, (eds.) The Routledge History of British Cinema. London, Routledge, 271-281.

Copyright and re-use policy

See <http://shura.shu.ac.uk/information.html>

GOOD OF ITS KIND? BRITISH FILM JOURNALISM

Sheldon Hall

In his introduction to the 1986 collection *All Our Yesterdays: 90 Years of British Cinema*, Charles Barr noted that successive phases in the history of minority film culture in the UK have been signposted by the appearance of a series of small-circulation journals, each of which in turn represented “the ‘leading edge’ or growth point of film criticism in Britain” (5). These journals were, in order of their appearance: *Close-Up*, first published in 1927; *Cinema Quarterly* (1932) and its direct successors *World Film News* (1936) and *Documentary News Letter* (1940), all linked to the documentary movement; *Sequence* (1947); *Sight and Sound* (1949, the date when the longstanding BFI house journal’s editorship was assumed by *Sequence* alumnus Gavin Lambert); *Movie* (1962); and *Screen* (1971, again the date of a change in editorial direction rather than a first issue as such). Barr further observed: “A strong recurring feature within this influential succession of magazines is a hostility to the established practices of British film journalism and/or British film-making, particularly when the one operates in chauvinistic support of the other” (6). In some cases, those established journalistic practices were associated with the immediately preceding minority magazine: *Movie* and its writers defined themselves partly in opposition to the critical ethos represented by *Sight and Sound*, while *Screen* similarly took up a position opposed to that of *Movie* (see, for example, the combative statements made in Perkins 1960, the Introduction to Cameron 1972, Rohdie 1972/3 and Neale 1975). However, aside from certain continuities (such as the importance accorded by both *Sequence* and *Movie* to Hollywood directors: see Gibbs 2001), if there is one thing which united these journals it was their antagonism to the prevailing currents of film journalism in the form of the reviewers writing for “lay” newspapers and

magazines aimed at the general public: in particular the so-called “quality” press of broadsheet newspapers and middlebrow periodicals (see, for instance, Anderson 1947).

Writing the year before the appearance of Barr’s anthology, in an issue of *Screen* (at that time the journal of the Society for Education in Film and Television) devoted to British cinema, Colin McArthur defined the majority of such mainstream critics (at any time, not just his contemporary moment) as lacking any clear awareness of, let alone having an ability to question, the role of film criticism in cultural life. Their assumptions of what criticism, or reviewing, should be had become so naturalised that it was impossible for such journalists even to articulate them or to detach themselves from the ingrained patterns of habit and custom: “You would be hard put to find a public statement by any British film reviewer as to what he/she considers his/her function since that is not the kind of thing the British go in for” (1985: 79). As a reviewer himself, McArthur had been an exception to this rule. When writing a regular column for the left-wing newspaper *Tribune* from 1971-78, he aimed “to operate a kind of running critique of film journalism as practised in the bourgeois press...describing and interrogating from a socialist perspective all the impulses, mechanisms and institutions of a complex film culture” (1982: 24-5).

However, in the three decades since McArthur and Barr wrote their respective accounts of film journalism, academic film studies has found other ways of utilising the press than constructing it as the antithesis of an intellectual or radical film culture. With the advent of “New Film History,” academics now eagerly avail themselves of past critical writing, often courtesy of the microfiche cuttings files held in the British Film Institute Library, as a route to “reception” studies. Rather than dismiss journalistic writing because of its institutionalised limitations or the failed percipience of its practitioners, historians now usually prefer to cite it as evidence of the contextual discourses shaping the perception of cinema; a film’s critical treatment thus becomes a part of its ongoing discursive history, a history of which the

historical study itself is a further instance, to be studied dispassionately rather than decried (see Klinger 1997). Thus not only the film industry and its products but also film criticism and other aspects of film journalism have become appropriate objects for study and research by historians who are indeed interested in the complexities of film culture in all their breadth and diversity, albeit often without the oppositional, polemical impulse of earlier writers such as McArthur.

Trade Journals and Other Periodicals

There are a number of ways in which film journalism, ~~including criticism or reviewing~~, can be categorised and its various manifestations grouped. Individual publications can be classed in terms of their intended readership and likely circulation patterns; their subject matter and typical areas of concern; the kinds of material they publish and the range of interests they address; their intellectual and cultural level or reach; and their relationship to the film industry and to other institutions and discourses, such as education, politics and religion. One basic form of categorisation is the distinction between publications aimed at “the trade” and those intended for a lay audience of “civilians.”

Among the richest sources of material for film historians are the trade papers typically read by filmmakers, distributors, exhibitors and “showmen,” but rarely by the average filmgoer. From the late 1920s to the early 1970s, the major British film trade papers were *Kinematograph Weekly* (renamed *Kine Weekly* in 1960) and *Today's Cinema* (known as *The Daily Cinema* between 1957 and 1968 and then as *Cinema TV Today* when it merged with *Kine Weekly* in 1971 before assuming its current incarnation, *Screen International*, in 1975). These journals, printed on glossy paper and often utilising colour for advertising displays by film distributors, published news stories and articles of interest to all sections of the industry, along with reviews aimed primarily at exhibitors who were looking for predictions of likely

commercial performance as well as comments on production quality (see James 2006). The “*Kine*”’s reviews editor, R.H. “Josh” Billings, who claimed to see and review all new films personally, also wrote a weekly column on box-office performance and compiled an annual box-office survey from 1936⁸ onwards (both taken over on Billings’ retirement in 1963 by the journal’s editor, Bill Altria). It is these lists and summaries which now provide most of what little evidence there is for the commercial performance of particular films in the UK. Before the 1980s, the trade papers rarely published actual figures for either distribution or exhibition grosses, though this began to change in the mid-1960s when weekly figures for individual theatres in the West End of London were released to the press. More generally, however, news items, articles and columns provided plentiful coverage and comment on, and therefore contemporary evidence of, pressing matters of concern for the trade (such as campaigns against taxation), along with information on distribution patterns, exhibition strategies and “showmanship” in the form of advertising stunts and marketing gimmicks. Some of these were stimulated by distributors’ campaign manuals and the major cinema chains’ head offices but others were the work of theatre managers and staff at the local level. It is also worth noting that the major American trade journals, *Variety* and the *Motion Picture Herald*, also had London offices whose reporters commented on matters of transatlantic interest, often suggesting different points of view for the US and UK.

The polar opposite of the trade press, though also ultimately serving the interests of the industry, were the “fan” magazines aimed at the broadest possible audience. These journals proliferated from about 1911 onwards: according to Andrew Shail (2008), the first UK fan magazine was *The Pictures*, which specialised in printing the stories (narratives) of current films; this remained a common form of marketing device in later years. Other fan papers focused on the public and “private” lives of stars, along with their fashion, makeup and beauty regimes. Such material formed part of the intertextual construction of star images and

fed the popular interest in gossip and glamour. More broadly, these publications mediated audiences' experience of the movies themselves, with their tie-in articles, lavish photo spreads and, in some cases, reviews. The longest-serving British fan weeklies, *Picturegoer* (known from its inception in 1914 as *Pictures and the Picturegoer* before shortening its name in 1920) and *Picture Show* (launched in 1919), both carried review sections; both also published letters columns, an invaluable (if not necessarily uncompromised) source of readers' opinions when first-hand access to audience responses is impossible [\(on *Picturegoer*, see Glancy 2011 and 2014\)](#). Ultimately, *Picture Show* and *Picturegoer* both went under in 1960, in a period of general commercial decline for the industry at large [\(on *Picturegoer*, see Baker 1985 and Glancy 2011 and 2014\)](#).

The UK's two major cinema chains, ABC and Odeon, each published a monthly to be sold in theatre foyers. *ABC Film Review* first appeared in 1950 and lasted in one form or another until as late as 2008; changing its name to *Film Review* in 1972, it subsequently became the independently critical, popular magazine the title suggests rather than a mere marketing tool. The Rank Organisation's equivalent, *Showtime*, lasted only from 1964-67, but Rank and the once-separate but jointly owned Odeon and Gaumont circuits also at various times had their own in-house newsletters aimed exclusively at company staff, as did the UK branches of several Hollywood majors such as MGM, Paramount and Universal.

The specialist film magazines discussed by Charles Barr and cited at the head of this chapter were read by relatively small audiences, drawn mostly from the university-educated elite or involved in intellectual film culture in its various forms, whether represented by the London Film Society (the principal influence on *Close-Up*), the documentary movement, the membership of the BFI's National Film Theatre and other private clubs and repertory cinemas, or the steadily growing and, in the 1970s, blooming film education sector. Although *Movie* was not strictly an academic journal, initially being pitched at a general if upmarket

readership, many of its regular contributors went on to become pioneers of film studies in higher education. It is not coincidental that its electronic successor, *Movie Online*, is hosted by the University of Warwick, where two of the original magazine's leading lights, V.F. Perkins and Robin Wood, taught some of the earliest university film courses in the UK. *Movie* lasted in print form until 2000, but the most durable of the intellectual magazines remains its arch-rival, *Sight and Sound*, which has at various times since its founding in 1932 been a quarterly and a monthly (as it now is, incorporating the BFI's previous long-running [1934-91] review journal, the *Monthly Film Bulletin*).

Falling outside the categories of trade journal, fan magazine and "leading edge" critical review, one journal might simply have been written off as a middle-of-the-road publication for middlebrow film buffs were it not for its very distinctive audience address. *Films and Filming* was published continuously from 1954 to 1980, then following a cessation and a change of editorial policy it resumed publication from 1981 until 1990. Throughout its existence the magazine was home to a wide range of writing, represented at its most intellectually ambitious, as well as most critically offbeat, by the work of Raymond Durnat. Its feature articles and lead reviews were often substantial, and as with the fan magazines its letters columns provide many insights into audience concerns and matters of public debate concerning the cinema. But *Films and Filming* has attracted retrospective attention mainly because, particularly in its 1960s heyday, it functioned as an above-ground forum for the still-closeted gay community (see Giori 2009 and Bengry 2011). This sub-cultural identity is most clearly manifested in the use of photographic material-spreads and in advertising material, whether in the form of homoerotic paid ads from retailers or in the coded messages of personal columns. It often seemed as though the journal was operating two discourses at once, almost independently of one another: the critical and topical coverage of the cinema up

front and centre-page, alongside and seemingly innocent of the co-presence of a more subversive voice speaking from the margins and between the lines.

Critics and Reviewers

Most commentators on criticism make a distinction between critics and reviewers, the latter usually being understood as inferior in seriousness and substance. Reviewers typically write their copy after a single viewing of the film under review, often close to the publication deadline. Because the review is usually published just before or shortly after the film is released, it is typically written in the assumption that the reader will not have seen the film before hand-reading. For that and other reasons, such as the assumption that the review will most likely be used by the readers as a consumer guide, influencing their choice of what to see, the writer is limited by how much and what they can say. Reviews are also normally written to fill a given space and several films may have to share that space, limiting further the amount that can be said about any one of them. Newspaper reviewers in particular were (are) also well aware that that space may shrink at short notice if other news or advertising material is added to the page at the last minute. Critics “proper,” on the other hand, may write about a film some time after its initial release, taking advantage of further opportunities to view it and feeling entitled to assume that the reader will also have had the time to see it. If the exegesis takes the form of an article or essay rather than a review, considerably more space may be afforded for contextualisation, interpretation and evaluation.

Although *Sequence*, *Sight and Sound*, *Movie* and the other “leading edge” magazines all published reviews (often quite lengthy ones, periodicals having greater luxury of space than most newspapers), they all also devoted space to longer analytical articles of this kind. A number of their contributors also published critical monographs, including for example *Movie*'s Perkins and Wood. However, relatively few British newspaper critics have published

books on the cinema, and few of those have been analytical studies of particular filmmakers, genres and so on: ~~A notable exception is~~ [include former Observer critic Philip French's book on the Western \(2005\)](#); and [David Robinson \(both have French has also written for both contributed to](#) *Sight and Sound* and [French to](#) *Movie*). Perhaps the most prolific book-writer among British reviewers is the late Alexander Walker, for many years the film critic of the London *Evening Standard*; his monographs included historical accounts of the British film industry since the 1960s, studies of stardom and sexuality on screen, several actor biographies and two anthologies of his journalism, but no work of sustained critical analysis. The number of British reviewers whose reviews have been anthologised is also relatively small. Besides Walker (1977) ~~and French (2011)~~, those who collected their journalism during their lifetime included James Agate (1946), more noted as a theatre critic; Graham Greene (1980), more celebrated as a novelist; Richard Winnington (~~n.d.~~1948), a critic well-regarded by his contemporaries but now largely as forgotten as his defunct newspaper, the *News Chronicle*; and the "Sunday ladies," C.A. Lejeune of the *Observer* (1947) and Dilys Powell of the *Sunday Times* (1989, 1992). Posthumous collections were also published for Agate (1948), Greene (2007), Winnington (1976) and Lejeune (1991). ~~Collections~~ [Anthologies](#) of more substantial material, including essays, have been devoted to two influential figures associated mainly with the documentary movement, John Grierson (1981) and Paul Rotha (1958), and to two mavericks: the film and theatre director Lindsay Anderson (2004), who as a critic had been associated with both *Sequence* and *Sight and Sound*; and Raymond Durnat (2014), a notably idiosyncratic voice who was also the author of a number of important monographs, some of them originally published in serial form in *Films and Filming*. [French's anthology \(2011\) was promised as the first of three, but the remaining two volumes have yet to appear; the initial collection comprises substantial articles, including reflections on fellow critics and the nature of film criticism \(see especially 49-57, 147-54\).](#)

When modern historians have turned to the published writings of reviewers, it has usually been to treat them diagnostically; that is, to read them as evidence of historical discourses shaping the perception and discussion of the cinema, rather than to find exegetical insights illuminating films themselves. There has been particular scholarly interest in the work of female reviewers, including Iris Barry (Wasson 2002 and 2006), Winifred Horrabin (Taylor 1992), E. Arnot Robinson (Selfe 2011) and of course Lejeune and Powell (Bell 2011, Selfe 2012). Other figures have attracted attention partly because of their notable achievements outside criticism: not just Greene, Grierson, Rotha and Anderson, of the writers mentioned above, but the novelist George Orwell (Meyers 1979) and Ivor Montagu (Turvey 2002), an important pioneer in minority film culture and in the prewar British film industry.

At least two edited collections aimed to provide a cross-section of contemporary critical reviewing at their respective historical moments: the 1930s in Cooke (1971), which samples both British and American journalists; and 1949-51 in Anstey, et al. (1951), limited to British writers alone. Cooke's retrospective introduction to the reprint of his 1937 anthology has the diffident, dilettantish tone, disclaiming any hint of pretension, of someone who wishes to avoid any suspicion of straining after significance; a tone shared, in their prefaces to their own work, by Agate, Greene and Lejeune. Adopting a more incisive approach is perhaps the most cogent (and most frequently cited) study of British film critics from a modern scholar: John Ellis's account of the "quality" press in the 1940s (Ellis 1978, revised 1996) treated the writings of more than a dozen reviewers as a univocal collective discourse, articulating for as well as through them a shared set of assumptions and values which, he argued, continued to underlie the professional practice of film journalism long after the period in question.

It was the failure, the apparent inability, to achieve self-awareness and to practise a more reflective, interrogative form of criticism or commentary which so antagonised Colin McArthur in his "complaint" about British film reviewing, and indeed which had spurred him

on to an oppositional practice in his own column in *Tribune*. But McArthur's contention that "[b]ourgeois film journalists never reflect on their own critical practice" (1982: 24) is not entirely accurate. In 1959 and 1960 *Films and Filming* asked a varied selection of writers and broadcasters to do precisely that, in a series of articles appearing on a monthly basis over thirteen issues (the last article being contributed by the magazine's own editor). I would like to conclude this chapter by summarising these articles in order to tease out the commonalities and the differences among this group of journalists at [another](#) particular historical moment. That moment occurred just before the profound disturbance in intellectual circles caused by the "critical debate" over film aesthetics and evaluative principles initiated in 1960 by contributors to the student magazine *Oxford Opinion* (later to become the founders of *Movie*), taken up by *Sight and Sound* and subsequently spreading to virtually every Anglophone outlet of "serious" film criticism over the next few years (see Gibbs 2013). The *Films and Filming* articles picture British film journalism "before the fall" represented by this debate and by the appearance of *Movie* and subsequently *Screen* (little though these minority voices ultimately impacted on the mainstream of film writing); and as this source appears to have been little exploited by scholars it seems appropriate to allow these self-reflective voices to be heard again.¹

Critical Self-Portraits

Invited to contribute articles to *Films and Filming*'s series of "Critical Self-Portraits" were eight newspaper columnists, two writers for weekly periodicals and two regular broadcasters, along with the host magazine's editor since 1955, Peter Baker. A number of the contributors had been in post since before the last war. The longest-serving, Jympson Harman, had been writing on films since 1913 and as the regular reviewer for the London *Evening News* since 1921. Campbell Dixon had been the film critic of the *Daily Telegraph* since 1931, Richard

Mallett for the satirical magazine *Punch* since 1938 and C.A. Lejeune for the *Observer* since 1928; before that she had written for the *Manchester Guardian* from 1922-8. Dick Richards had recently taken up residence at the *Daily Mirror* but had been writing on film since 1929 (Richards also contributed reviews and reporting to *Variety*). Of the other newspaper regulars, Fred Majdalany had been critic for the *Daily Mail* from 1946, Leonard Mosley for the *Daily Express* from 1947, and Paul Dehn for the *News Chronicle* from 1954. It was the policy of *The Times* to publish reviews anonymously, so Dudley Carew was identified only as the critic of “the paper read by top people” and gave no details of the length of his service. Of the broadcasters, “the distinguished Scottish critic” Forsyth Hardy had written for the *Scotsman* from 1930-40 while Gordon Gow (Australian-born, like Dixon) was freelance but worked mainly for the BBC, also contributing reviews to *Films and Filming*. Finally, as a staffer on *Picturegoer*, Margaret Hinxman wrote for a more “popular,” downmarket film publication.²

The particularities of their various outlets accounted for some of the differences of emphasis among the critics. As a representative of the most avowedly populist journal, Hinxman insisted on the importance of taking every film equally seriously, asserting that “fans” were just as entitled to an honest opinion as any other type of reader, and in fact were likely to be a more knowledgeable and dedicated readership than most. Similarly, as the only tabloid reviewer, Richards emphasised “honesty of personal assessment” as a core principle. He argued that the critic’s opinion should remain the same irrespective of their outlet and offered the argument (commonplace among tabloid journalists) that he would find it “easier to write for a ‘longhair’ publication than their contributors would for the popular press” (15). The broadsheet critics did not feel a comparable need for defensiveness, but Mosley was the only writer to express overt ~~disdain-distaste~~ for the vulgarity of the popular audience, whereas Harman stated that the critic “does not achieve trust by totalitarian gestures of disdain for the

average man's preferences" (31). For Baker, the very popularity of the cinema, and of particular films, was a condition of its importance: "If...I devote most of my attention to what goes on in the 'popular cinema' it is because these are the films that make the greater impact on the greater number of people and the way they live" (35).

Where did the critic's primary responsibility lie? For Lejeune it was to her newspaper; for Mosley, to himself. Majdalany argued that the "first requirement of any critic in any field is that he should be entertaining even when the object criticised is not" (15). Most agreed on the importance of expressing their honest personal opinion and on the necessarily subjective nature of judgments. Harman, Dixon and Richards all made the point that consistently applying their own standards of evaluation made it possible for their readers to make allowances for personal idiosyncrasies and thus to know whether their own tastes coincided or contrasted with the critic's.

The question of "commitment" (a buzz-word in critical circles for several years following Lindsay Anderson's polemical article of 1956, "Stand up! Stand up!") was raised by several writers. According to Majdalany, who distinguished a range of different attitudes among his fellow critics, this meant that for some young, left-wing commentators, "criticism is a platform for the airing of political and social resentments" (15). To Gow, it would have seemed to be taking unfair advantage of the freedom of expression accorded broadcasters to impose his own "viewpoint" on a film; he claimed that his "enthusiasm helps me to recognise virtues in a film that expresses a point of view I don't happen to agree with" (13). Harman claimed only to demand "sincerity" in filmmaking while Baker looked for films "that inspire with the right human qualities, that capture the imagination, excite ambition" (15). Insofar as any critics admitted to making other than aesthetic judgments (or judgments about entertainment value), it was in relation to wider experience of what Hardy called "real life" (15) as well as the arts. According to Dixon,

a film is not what theologians call a special creation. It does not originate from nothing, in a void. It is a picture of men and women in a certain set of circumstances, and if the critic knows nothing about such people, and such circumstances, how on earth can he judge whether the picture be true or false? (15)

Here is stated plainly enough the realist, humanist aesthetic often said (by McArthur, for one) to underlie British criteria of value.

Lejeune disclaimed interest in “social significance” and stressed the importance of personal opinion but “*not* personal prejudice...All critics, being human, have their prejudices, but when they let them get the better of their judgment they are stepping out of line” (9). Dixon, on the other hand, argued that “All criticism is prejudice,” whether “based on wide knowledge and a cultivated taste, in which case the criticism will be good, or...on ignorance and vulgarity, in which case it will be bad” (15). Mosley concurred:

It is for this reason, especially in a popular newspaper, that a film critic is so inclined to make use of the personal pronoun. He wants to make it plain not only that this is an intensely personal opinion, but exactly what are his preferences and prejudices as he sits in judgment. (15)

As for cinematic specificity, Mallett and Gow claimed to be enthusiasts of the medium for its own sake. Gow’s “idea of a good film is one that uses the techniques at its disposal to the best advantage” (13). Mallett expressed an interest in the use of “film language...the more interesting to eye and ear it becomes by the use of it the better and more enjoyable I think it

is” (15). He even anticipated the editorial policy of *Movie* by claiming only to write at length about the films that he had positively enjoyed ~~(for a favourable retrospective assessment of Mallett, see Chatten 2001).~~³ More common, however, was the assertion that it was unnecessary for the critic to have any special interest in the cinema as such. In recounting their early careers, Harman and Dixon emphasised that they had been assigned to the job of film reviewer rather than choosing it for themselves. Majdalany admitted frankly: “I think the importance of “loving the medium” is often exaggerated. I do not love the cinema, though I enjoy films and the slightly mad frantic background which provides them. Too much dedication can be a bore.” (15) Richards similarly argued that there was no need to love the medium, though it was best not to hate it, and Carew stated that “a certain coolness, a feeling of not being passionately involved, is to be desired in the film critic – and in the film critic only” (17). Lejeune claimed that there was “no longer any point in talking ‘art’ to readers. They know as much about film art as I do” (9).⁴ But Carew was the only one of these critics to state openly that “the commercial cinema is not an art; if it is, it is the art of compromise” (15).

Lejeune and Hinxman acknowledged the practical constraints of their job, such as the limitations on space which obliged a certain economy in prose style. Lejeune also referred to the need to make allowances for the possibility of sub-editors’ cuts, which were more likely to be made to the end of a review than the beginning. Several writers hoped that their criticism might have a positive effect on filmmaking, and Gow and Richards mentioned the usefulness of having access to insider information about the industry; but only Dehn and Hardy had actively worked in film production: the former as a screenwriter, the latter in documentary. Dehn argued that it was beneficial, if not essential, for the critic to have had some practical experience of the medium, if only to know where and how to apportion credit or blame.⁵

Finally, what interpretative or evaluative method did these critics bring to bear on the objects of their scrutiny? Dixon resisted any such notion: “Are contributors to this series expected to lay down principles – to subscribe, as Poe did, to a rationale of criticism? I hope not.” (15). Harman and Hardy hoped to be able to deduce directorial intentions, and the latter gave voice to an archetypal schema: “Discover the purpose, judge its worth, criticise the technique.” (15). Richards offered his own variation: “(a) What is a film setting out to achieve? (b) Is such an attempt worthwhile? (c) How nearly does the film team achieve what it is trying to do?” (15). Neither critic offered any clue as to how they might “discover the purpose” of the films whose success in achieving it, along with its worth, was to be the subject of their reviews. Mallett acknowledged the challenge of trying to offer a balanced assessment of relative success and failure when the ordinary reader might want nothing more than a simple answer to the question, “Is it good?” (15). Baker stated plainly that the “critic’s function...is to find and encourage what is good for Cinema” (15) but could not produce a more precise definition of “a good film” than “the picture I would gladly leave a winter fireside and travel ten miles by public transport on a wet, windy night to see” (35). But one telling phrase recurs across several articles (Lejeune, Hinxman, Mallett), still begging the questions of definition and discrimination but in its very repetition pointing to a commonly held principle that the critics felt they could best articulate by recourse to a shared mantra: they looked for and applauded a film that was “good of its kind.”

(5,124~~30~~5 words including notes)

Related Topics

The Early Trade Press

References

- Adair, G. (1982) "The Critical Faculty or... 'My readers may not know much about art, but they know what I like'," *Sight & Sound* (Autumn): 248-57.
- Agate, J. (1946) *Around Cinemas*, Home & Van Thal.
- (1948) *Around Cinemas (Second Series)*, Home & Van Thal.
- Anderson, L. (1947) "Angles of Approach," *Sequence* 2: 5-8.
- (1956) "Stand up! Stand up!," *Sight and Sound* (Autumn): 63-9.
- (2004) *Never Apologise: The Collected Writings of Lindsay Anderson*, ed. Paul Ryan. London: Plexus Publishing.
- Anstey, E., E. Lindgren, R. Manvell, P. Rotha, eds. (1951) *Shots in the Dark*. London: Allan Wingate.
- [Baker, B. \(1985\) 'Picturegoes', *Sight and Sound* \(Summer\): 206-9.](#)
- Barr, C. (1986) "Introduction: Amnesia and Schizophrenia," in Barr (ed.) *All Our Yesterdays: 90 Years of British Cinema*, London: BFI Publishing: 1-29.
- Bell, M (2011) "Film Criticism as 'Women's Work': the Gendered Economy of Film Criticism in Britain, 1945-65," *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television* 31 (2): 191-209.
- Bengry, J. (2011) "The Queer History of *Films and Filming*," *Little Joe* 2: 32-39.
- Cameron, I., ed. (1972) *The Movie Reader*. London: November Books.
- Chatten, R. (2001) "Richard Mallett at the pictures: a critic in context," *Journal of Popular British Cinema* 4: 30-39.
- Cooke, A., ed. (1971) *Garbo and the Night Watchmen*, London: Secker & Warburg.
- Durgnat, R. (2014) *The Essential Raymond Durgnat*, ed. H.K. Miller, London: British Film Institute.

Ellis, J. (1978) "Art, Culture and Quality – Terms for a Cinema in the Forties and Seventies," *Screen* 19 (3): 9-49.

----- (1996) "The Quality Film Adventure: British Critics and the Cinema, 1942-1948," in A. Higson (ed.), *Dissolving Views: Key Writings on British Cinema*, London and New York: Cassell: 66-93.

~~French, P. (2005) *Westerns: Aspects of a Movie Genre*, London: Carcanet Press.~~

~~French, P. ----- (2011) *I Found It at the Movies: Reflections of a Cinephile*, London: Carcanet Press.~~

Gibbs, J. (2001) "Sequence and the archaeology of British film criticism," *Journal of Popular British Cinema*, 4: 14-29.

----- (2013) *The Life of Mise-en-scène: Visual Style and British Film Criticism, 1946-78*, Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press.

Giori, M. (2009) "'A sensible magazine for intelligent film-goers.' Notes for a History of *Films and Filming* (1954-1990)," *Paragrafo V*: 57-88; available online at <https://www.academia.edu/2023952/>

Formatted: Italian (Italy)

Glancy, M. (2011) "*Picturegoer*: The Fan Magazine and Popular Film Culture in Britain During the Second World War," *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television* 31 (4): 453-78.

----- (2014) *Hollywood and the Americanization of Britain: From the 1920s to the Present*. London and New York: I.B. Tauris.

Greene, G. (1980) *The Pleasure-Dome: The Collected Film Criticism, 1935-40*, ed. J.R. Taylor, Oxford: Oxford University Press.

----- (2007) *Mornings in the Dark: The Graham Greene Film Reader*, ed. D. Parkinson, London: Carcanet Press.

Grierson, J. (1981) *Grierson at the Movies*, ed. F. Hardy, London: Faber & Faber.

- James, R. (2006) "Kinematograph Weekly in the 1930s: Trade Attitudes Towards Audience Taste," *Journal of British Cinema and Television* 3 (2): 229-43.
- Klinger, B. (1997) "Film history terminable and interminable: recovering the past in reception studies," *Screen* 38 (2): 107-28.
- Lejeune, C.A. (1947) *Chestnuts in Her Lap, 1936-1946*, London: Phoenix House.
- (1991) *The C.A. Lejeune Film Reader*, ed. A. Lejeune, London: Carcanet Press.
- McArthur, C. (1982) *Dialectic! Left Film Criticism*, London: Key Texts.
- (1985) "British Film Reviewing: a Complaint," *Screen* 26 (1): 79-84.
- Meyers, J. (1979) "Orwell as Film Critic," *Sight & Sound* (Autumn): 255-6.
- Neale, S. (1975) "The Return of *Movie*," *Screen* 16 (3): 112-5.
- Perkins, V.F. (1960) "Fifty Famous Films 1915-45," *Oxford Opinion* 38 (April): 36-37.
- (1972) *Film as Film: Understanding and Judging Movies*, Harmondsworth: Penguin.
- Powell, D. (1989) *The Golden Screen: Fifty Years of Films*, ed. G. Perry, London: Pavilion/Michael Joseph.
- (1992) *The Dilys Powell Film Reader*, ed. C. Cook, Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press.
- Quigley, I. (2003) "Being a Film Reviewer in the 1950s," in I. MacKillop and N. Sinyard (eds), *British cinema of the 1950s: a celebration*, Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press: 213-20.
- Rohdie, S. (1972/3) "Review: *Movie Reader, Film as Film*," *Screen* 13 (4): 135-45.
- Rotha, P. (1958) *Rotha on the Film: A Selection of Writings about the Cinema*, London: Faber and Faber.
- Rotha, P., B. Wright, L. Anderson, P. Houston (1958) "The Critical Issue," *Sight & Sound* (Autumn): 270-5, 330.

Selfe, M. (2011) “‘Intolerable Flippancy’: The Arnot Robertson v. MGM Libel Case (1946-1950) and the Evolution of BBC Policy on Broadcast Film Criticism,” *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television* 31 (3): 373-98.

----- (2012) “Circles, Columns and Screenings: Mapping the Institutional, Discursive, Physical and Gendered Spaces of Film Criticism in 1940s London,” *Journal of British Cinema and Television* 9 (4): 588-611.

Shail, A. (2008) “The motion picture story magazine and the origins of British film culture,” *Film History* 20 (2): 181-97.

Taylor, I. (1992) “The film reviews of Winifred Horrabin, 1927-45.” *Screen* 33 (2): 174-83.

Turvey, G. (2002) “Towards a Cultural Practice: Ivor Montagu and British Film Culture in the 1920s,” in A. Higson (ed.), *Young and Innocent? The Cinema in Britain, 1896-1930*, Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 2002: 306-20.

Walker, A. (1977) *Double Takes: Notes and Afterthoughts on Movies, 1956-76*, London: Elm Tree Books.

Wasson, H. (2002) “Writing the Cinema into Daily Life: Iris Barry and the Emergence of British Film Criticism in the 1920s,” in A. Higson (ed.), *Young and Innocent? The Cinema in Britain, 1896-1930*, Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 2002: 321-37.

----- (2006) “The woman film critic: newspapers, cinema and Iris Barry,” *Film History* 18 (2): 154-62.

Winnington, R. ([n.d.1948](#)) *Drawn and Quartered*, ed. N. Bentley, London: The Saturn Press.

----- (1976) *Film Criticism and Caricatures, 1943-53*, ed. P. Rotha, New York: Barnes & Noble.

“Critical Self-Portraits” series in *Films and Filming*:

1. Lejeune, C.A. (1959) “On Not Being Committed” (June): 9

2. Hinxman, M. (1959) "Even a 'Fan' Deserves an Honest Answer" (July): 15
3. Mosley, L. (1959) "The Audience Is My Enemy" (August): 15
4. Carew, D. (1959) "A Compromise with Art" (September): 15, 17
5. Dehn, P. (1959) "Both Sides of a Fence" (October): 15, 29
6. Harman, J. (1959) "All I Demand Is Sincerity" (November): 15, 31
7. Mallett, R. (1959) "Honesty Is Best" (December): 15, 27
8. Majdalany, F. (1960) "In an Age of 'No Time'" (January): 15
9. Hardy, F. (1960) "Looking at Reality" (February): 15, 34
10. Gow, G. (1960) "The Spell of Mere Movement" (March): 13, 34
11. Dixon, C. (1960) "All Criticism Is Prejudiced" (April): 15, 28
12. Richards, D. (1960) "Writing for the Masses" (May): 15, 35
13. Baker, P. (1960) "Without Fear, Favour... or Pretension" (June): 15, 35

Further Reading

Donald, J., A. Friedberg and L. Marcus, eds. (1998) *Close Up, 1927-1933: Cinema and Modernism*, London: Cassell. Selected articles from the first "serious" British film journal.

Manvell, R., ed. (1977) *The Penguin Film Review, 1946-1949* (two volumes), London: Scolar Press. Complete reprint (nine issues) of a key postwar journal.

Wilson, D., ed. (1982) *Sight and Sound: A Fiftieth Anniversary Selection*, London: Faber & Faber. Complete back runs of *Sight and Sound* and its sister journal the *Monthly Film Bulletin* are available online to subscribing members of the British Film Institute.

Notes

¹ Gilbert Adair, in his facetious potted history and survey of film criticism for *Sight and Sound* (1982), quoted from several of these articles without explicit acknowledgement.

² Of these thirteen critics, only Lejeune has been represented in book form by anthologies of film journalism, though Hardy edited two collections of work by John Grierson and Gow, Hinxman and Mosley each wrote books on various film-related subjects (including respectively the thriller and Hollywood in the 1950s, Dirk Bogarde, and the Hollywood moguls Darryl F. Zanuck and Walt Disney). Mosley and Majdalany were also military historians. For another self-portrait of a critic writing in the 1950s, see Quigley (2003).

³ [For a favourable retrospective assessment of Mallett, see Chatten 2001.](#)

⁴ Lejeune is perhaps most notorious for a passage written for the *Observer* in 1947 and later quoted by V.F. Perkins: having “decided that films were nothing but ‘bits of celluloid and wire’, [she] felt ‘ready to declare categorically that films are not an art...It is not within the power of electrical engineering or mechanical contraption to create. They can only reproduce. And what they reproduce is not art.’” (1972: 9).

⁵ Dehn wrote or co-wrote the screenplays of thirteen films, including *Seven Days to Noon* (1950), *Orders to Kill* (1958), *Goldfinger* (1964), *The Spy Who Came in from the Cold* (1965), *Murder on the Orient Express* (1974) and the four sequels (1970-73) to *Planet of the Apes* (1968).