



Muse of Fire: Richard Burton

Look Back in Anger

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Directed by: Tony Richardson

©: Woodfall Film Productions

a Woodfall film

Produced by: Harry Saltzman

Production Manager: Al Marcus

Casting Director: Robert Lennard

Scenario Editor: Frederick Gotfurt

Screenplay by: Nigel Kneale

Based on the play by: John Osborne

Additional Dialogue by: John Osborne

Director of Photography: Oswald Morris

Camera Operator: Denys Coop

Editor: Richard Best

Editor: Bert Bates *

Art Director: Peter Glazier

Make-up: Eric Aylott

Music Hall Song: Tom Eastwood

Music Performed by: The Chris Barber Band

Music Supervisor: John Addison

Sound: Cecil Mason, Len Shilton

Transport Manager: Eddie Frewin *

Publicity Director: Alan Thomson *

Studio: Elstree Studios

Cast:

Richard Burton (*Jimmy Porter*)

Claire Bloom (*Helena Charles*)

Mary Ure (*Alison Porter*)

Edith Evans (*Mrs 'Ma' Tanner*)

Gary Raymond (*Cliff*)

Glen Byam Shaw (*Colonel Redfern*)

George Devine (*doctor*)

Donald Pleasence (*Hurst*)

Phyllis Neilson-Terry (*Mrs Redfern*)

members of the English Stage Company

Jane Eccles (*Miss Drury*)

S.P. Kapoor (*Kapoor*)

Walter Hudd (*actor*)

Anne Dickins (*girl A.S.M.*)

John Dearth (*pet stall man*)

Nigel Davenport (*1st commercial traveller*)

Alfred Lynch (*2nd commercial traveller*)

Toke Townley (*spectacled man*)

Bernice Swanson (*Sally*)

Jordan Lawrence (*producer*) *

UK 1958©

99 mins

35mm

* Uncredited

Screening with a BBC interview with Richard Burton and Claire Bloom on *Look Back in Anger* (8min)

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SOUND**

A contemporary review

Is Richard Burton too old for Jimmy? At the time I found his performance in *Look Back in Anger* so compelling that I did not question his physical suitability. And there is no doubt about his complete psychic absorption in the role. It is true that Burton the actor always snarls and scowls and curls his lip; but these are unmistakably the snarls and grimaces of Jimmy Porter. Whether the credit is due more to the director, the actor, or to intelligent casting (which is certainly the case with Claire Bloom's exact and brilliant Helena) it is hard to judge; but this is in any case a performance of the first rank.

One difficulty with Jimmy arises out of the severe cutting of the play's first scene. In the original we had time to learn something of the protagonist's tastes and fears and problems before his worst abuse and eventual assault upon Alison. In the film we first see him in a few short scenes without dialogue (at the jazz club, returning home, going to bed with Alison, getting up the next morning). Then, after a couple of dozen lines of the truncated Sunday-morning brawl, Alison is hurt and Jimmy leaves the flat.

So peremptory a treatment might leave an audience thinking that Jimmy is just a boor – as Helena and some of the play's first critics found him. This is the justification for a new character, Ma Tanner (beautifully played by Edith Evans, who in two brief scenes gives the old lady a completeness and richness we rarely see in our cinema). Ma Tanner is a direct way through to Jimmy such as we lacked in the play. She and Jimmy are in direct contact; they talk to each other simply and easily, without the defences of anger and bitterness which Jimmy interposes between himself and the rest of the world. Ma asks him, 'what do you want to do in the world?'; and if his answer, 'Everything – nothing' is evasive, it is not because he wants to fox her, but because he can answer nothing else.

The only player from the original stage production is Mary Ure as Alison; and she is perhaps the least satisfactory of the principals. 'I'm a conventional girl': Mary Ure is too strange, too individual in appearance and manner for Alison. Cliff is a difficult role. His position between the husband and wife is ambiguous. Gary Raymond solves the problems by a very simple and direct interpretation; and here, yet again, one feels that the director has greatly simplified his own work by typecasting of the most intelligent and constructive kind.

Look Back in Anger is Tony Richardson's first feature film; and it occasionally betrays inexperience. There are touches of smartness – the ghost trumpet of the opening, the high angle shot as Helena leaves the stage, over-clever image cuts from sequence to sequence, an excessive fondness for dissolves (some of which are very good), gratuitous bits of 'social significance,' (like the ruinous faces of the old men whom Jimmy and Helena pass in the park), the picturesque last shot of Jimmy and Alison silhouetted on a railway bridge, surrounded by clouds of smoke and steam.

But these meretricious moments are quite insignificant beside Richardson's whole achievement in developing a style to the purposes of the piece. It is as yet a sometimes strained, intellectual style; but this is no demerit in a cinema where for so long filmmaking has just been a business of illustrating scripts with

Muse of Fire: Richard Burton

Look Back at Richard Burton

Tue 2 Dec 18:15

The Last Days of Dolwyn

Tue 2 Dec 20:30 (+ intro by actor Kate Burton, Richard Burton's daughter); Sun 14 Dec 12:00

The Night of the Iguana

Fri 5 Dec 18:10; Mon 22 Dec 20:25

My Cousin Rachel

Fri 5 Dec 20:50; Sat 6 Dec 14:00

Now Barabbas Was a Robber...

Sat 6 Dec 11:50; Fri 12 Dec 20:50

Look Back in Anger

Sat 6 Dec 16:10; Mon 15 Dec 20:50

A Subject of Scandal and Concern + extended intro by John Wyver, writer and television producer
Sun 7 Dec 12:45

The Comedians

Sun 7 Dec 15:00 (+ intro by season co-curator James Bell); Sun 21 Dec 14:30

Boom!

Mon 8 Dec 18:10 (+ intro by Charlotte Frances Burton, Richard Burton's granddaughter);
Sat 27 Dec 14:15

The Spy Who Came in From the Cold

Mon 8 Dec 20:30 (+ intro by Charlotte Frances Burton, Richard Burton's granddaughter);
Wed 17 Dec 18:10

Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?

Sat 13 Dec 17:50; Mon 29 Dec 20:30

1984

Mon 15 Dec 18:20 (+ intro by Lucy Bolton, Queen Mary University of London); Sat 27 Dec 20:45

Philosophical Screens: 1984

Mon 15 Dec 20:30 Blue Room

Exorcist II: The Heretic

Fri 19 Dec 20:45; Sun 28 Dec 18:30

Equus

Sat 20 Dec 12:00; Tue 30 Dec 17:45

Where Eagles Dare

Sat 20 Dec 17:20; Sun 28 Dec 14:45

Villain

Tue 23 Dec 18:10; Sun 28 Dec 12:00

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moving pictures. And sometimes the most self-consciously intellectualised images are outstandingly successful.

The scenes in the flat are mostly shot with a camera which moves incessantly and ingeniously – turning, tracking in and out, panning from side to side, often within a single shot. Again this is a risky device, a great pitfall for the tyro; and again it is used with outstanding success. (Especially credit is due here to the virtuosity of the cameraman, Oswald Morris. To a producer-director-scenarist team all working on their first film, the asset of a director of photography of Morris's experience must have been significant.) However exploratory, nervous, wandering, the camera movement is never obtrusive. We are not so much aware of a physical movement as of a sensation of turmoil and disturbance perfectly keyed to the action within the pictures.

Alongside these involved camera explorations goes an extreme use of close-ups, which are again employed expressively – never decoratively as they are generally used in the commercial cinema. It is interesting to notice how in three lines of dialogue and ten shots, Richardson presents the whole situation and all the nuances of Alison's desertion of Jimmy. For expressiveness I would particularly commend the one close-up in which Alison, caught between Jimmy and Helena, throws up her head like a frightened foal, perfectly imaging her helpless inadequacy.

Above all, where the film might have moved sluggishly, dragged down by the weight of dialogue on one hand and by this elaborate technique on the other, it is always rapid, quick, consistently exhilarating.

Look Back in Anger is a breakthrough – to a much greater extent, I believe, than *Room at the Top*, with which it must inevitably be compared. Here is a film which has something to say, and which says it without reference to conventional box-office values. It is a film in which a director has developed a personal style for the purposes of his theme. It is a film that can hold its own in the international field. It is a film with the power to excite you. And it is also a film which cost a quarter of a million pounds.

Can the breakthrough be maintained? We know our producers too well; and if *Look Back in Anger* makes money, they will be more inclined to produce disastrous imitations of the angry young man in the bed-sitter, than to find a way to give to young artists of Tony Richardson's calibre the degree of independence which he has had. The breakthrough will not be maintained by the series of films we can easily imagine, with Jack Hawkins as Porter or Dirk Bogarde as Porter or Kenneth More as Porter or John Mills as Porter. It will be by making use of Richardson's compeers – the young artists who, like him, have already proved themselves in the theatre and the *court-métrage* cinema.

David Robinson, *Sight and Sound*, Summer/Autumn 1959