British Culture and Society: British Society on Films

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| *Brit társadalom és kultúra mai filmek tükrében* |  *BBNAN13000* |

**Lecturer**: Balogh Beatrix

**Time and place**: Friday 10.15-11.45 BTK Z Rm 214

Apart from the occasional in-class screening all mandatory-item movies are viewed at home. The movies must be watched by the time indicated in the syllabus.

**Availability**: On Fridays by appointment or via email: trixiebalogh@yahoo.com

**Purpose** of the course is to gain further insight into issues of British society through British movies. Far from presenting a comprehensive survey of the contemporary social, political and cultural reality we will choose a few important recurring themes and 1, discuss how these issues/realities are present and presented in British cinema 2, and what particular insight we can gain about British identity and British society through these representations. In this respect, the course intends to revisit key features of British society you learned about in an introductory survey/lecture course, albeit through a specific medium.

We will watch a selection of iconic British movies and will gain insight into the North-South divide, Social Class, Religion and Ethnicity, National Drama and Trauma, British and Regional (negotiated) identities, Social and Gender roles, and Quintessential English humour.

Literal and theatrical traditions, genres, narratives, literary theories will be discussed only as attendant to telling a “story” or exploring deep-seated notions of society with cinematic techniques. Instead, the course will focus on the real lives and social realities. You will meet -- hear the problems and accents of -- real and fictional characters ranging from the Sheffield miner, or council estate dweller to London professionals, or the Queen.

**Format and Requirements:** class participation, response notes, presentation, end-term test

The main format of exploring social issues is discussion. After an introduction to a “main theme” you will watch the assigned movies at home and come to class with your remarks and questions. Short texts to familiarize students with the social or political background of the movies will be provided.

**Response notes**: partly to demonstrate your familiarity with the movie (to show that you have indeed watched it) you are to write a short (1paragraph) informal ‘reaction’ and submit it before class. (What you liked/disliked, found interesting/difficult, in what way you found the movie instructive/informative/distressing/funny; in other words, your personal reaction as audience). Add to it one or two questions you would like to raise in class. You are to watch the movie even if you cannot come to class (see below at “attendance and grading policy”)

In one of these “response notes” (longer in format but written in a semi-formal, no-nonsense style) you will compare how two movies of your choice reflect on the same theme.

**Presentation:** Choose a movie/theme and prepare a short talk (ppt and/or handout aided) in which you explore a question or explain the social background.

**End-term test:** short essay questions (list of possible questions will be distributed) to be answered in 3-5 sentences in which you will give account of your familiarity with class discussions.

Compulsory films: *The Full Monty, Billy Elliott, Trainspotting, Bloody Sunday, Remains of the Day, Four Weddings and a Funeral, Bridget Jones’s Diary, The Queen, Bend it like Beckham, Love Actually*.

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| class | date | Discussion topic | reading assignment for class |
| 1, Sept 27 | **Introduction**, goal orientation, syllabus, group members. Past experiences with British Movies. Cinema and society: cinema as entertainment, social record, artistic project. Emblematic/cult movies and their “authors”. Filmmaking in America and Britain. | “Capturing Britain: 10 Films to Represent a Nation” *culturetrip.com*; Top21 British Directors of all times” *The Telegraph*. in-class reading |
| 2, Oct 4 | The working class of the ‘North’**;** comedies to celebrate and criticize the social world***The Full Monty, Billy Elliot*** | “The north of England: The great divide” *The Economist*, 15 Sept, 2012 |
| 3, Oct 11  | Regional identities negotiated through class and ethnic consciousness I. “Sulphurous humour, brutal recklessness”, incomprehensible dialect and a worm’s eyes view from Edinburgh in Danny Boyle’s ***Trainspotting***  | “’Trainspotting’ made easy for Americans” *The Independent* May 1996, (why the movie had to be dubbed); “So to speak” *The Guardian*, may 2008. |
| 4, Oct 18 | Regional identities; Northern Ireland: “The Troubles” ***Bloody Sunday***; *(The Guilford Four)* | BBC.com “Bloody Sunday” |
| 5, Oct 25 | Memory, loyalty, dignity, politics, and social constraints - Contextualizing and deconstructing Britishness ***Remains of the Day***  | “Books of The Times; An Era Revealed in a Perfect Butler's Imperfections” *The New York Times* |
|  |  | Autumn break (October 28 – November 3) |  |
| 6, Nov 8 | Romantic comedies and the imagined, cinematic place I: Affluent high society in their clumsiness: ***Four Weddings and a Funeral*** | “The subversive awkwardness of *Four Weddings and a Funera*l” *The Atlantic*, April 2016 |
| 7, Nov 15 | ***Bridget Jones’s Diary***How can humour be culture specific? | -- |
| 8, Nov 22 | Ethnicity and Religion – culture clash in multi-ethnic Britain ***Bend it like Beckham****(East is East, Snatch, Slumdog millionaire)* | “Why are there hardly any films for British Indians?” *British Council*, “British Indians: a remarkable story of success” *The Telegraph* |
| 9, Nov 29 | The Monarchy through the lens of political necessities, personal drama and national crisis. A poignant study of ***The Queen***, set in the aftermath of the 1997 death of Diana.  | “What the Royal family does”  |
| 10, Dec 6 | ***Love Actually***, The “ensemble-cast-multi-thread-holiday-spirit movie,”  | Danny Boyle v Richard Curtis reflections on British society |
| 11, Dec 13 | **End-term test** |  |

Attendance, class work, and evaluation:

1. You should prepare for each class. Watch the movie and read the assigned text before the class discussions. **Missing a class does not exempt you from watching the movie assigned for that week** or preparing for the next
2. You may miss a **maximum of 3 classes** during the semester. Please use this considerable freedom judiciously and responsibly. Since you may be bound to miss classes due to an illness (counted into the 3 possible absences), do not miss a class for an alluring alternative activity. If you miss more than 3 classes, your course will be marked “incomplete”.
3. To help prevent such an occurrence **2 classes can be missed at the students’ own convenience and without any consequence**. However, a formal notice is required for the third occasion. Response notes should be turned in notwithstanding.
4. **Do not miss the end-term test.** The seminar group is to complete the same test at the same time. A make-up exam by appointment should be saved for an extraordinary situation. Having a cold does not qualify as extraordinary.

Evaluation: Your final grade will be based on the following components. The relative weight of each component is given in parenthesis:

1. Class work: meaningful participation in class discussions, authentic response notes (40%),
2. Presentation and Compare & Contrast paper (20%),
3. End-term test (40%)