



A Level Film Studies 'Trainspotting' (Boyle, 1996)

COMPONENT 1: VARIETIES OF FILM AND FILMMAKING

Section C: British film since 1995

Written examination: 2.5 hours
35% of qualification

AO1 Demonstrate knowledge and understanding of elements of film
AO2 Apply knowledge and understanding of elements of film to:
analyse and compare films, including through the use of critical approaches
evaluate the significance of critical approaches
analyse and evaluate own work in relation to other professionally produced work

CONTEXTS

Production | Social and Political | Critical Debate

INSTITUTIONAL Channel 4 films; sponsors of often controversial subject matter and non-mainstream movies. low £1.5 mill budget; made £48 mill. most successful Brit film of 90s. 18 age rating but still controversy over the under age sex scene

POLITICAL Scotland oppressed by English colonialism; American pop culture saturates the country. Youth alienation and generational conflict. Absence of police. Diseased capitalist dream

SOCIAL AIDS a big social problem. Captures the zeitgeist. Humour / controversy / new stars. Controversial positive representation of Heroin and graphic use depicted at start of the film

CULTURAL White male drug addicts; no range of cultural backgrounds. Divide between Scotland and London becomes a metaphor for under-class and middle-class consumerism. Being on the dole a way of life; how to dodge meaningful employment (Spud's interview)

IDEOLOGY AND THEMES

PATRIARCHAL SOCIETY Few female characters rendered to love interest

CONSUMERISM Mocks the spectator for conforming to consumerism. Grubby over-priced London city apartments are sold to wannabe yuppies. Money is the goal for the characters

CRIMINALITY Begbie seen as less criminal than Renton despite his violence; a societal prejudice? Sick Boy's criminality worsens after baby Dawn's death

FINAL IDEOLOGICAL MESSAGE Has achieved happiness by getting money and getting away from toxic people and lifestyles. Optimistic ending?

Boyle presents dominant hegemonic values and the way out of addiction in lower-class Scotland to be moving to a capitalist city, settling down and working

SOCIETY Existence of an under-class; those forgotten by capitalism. No sense of support / law / order / sharing or caring! Recession evident

SYNOPSIS

Cast and Crew

Heroin addict Mark Renton (Ewan McGregor) stumbles through bad ideas and sobriety attempts with his unreliable friends -- Sick Boy (Jonny Lee Miller), Begbie (Robert Carlyle), Spud (Ewen Bremner) and Tommy (Kevin McKidd). He also has an underage girlfriend, Diane (Kelly Macdonald), along for the ride. After cleaning up and moving from Edinburgh to London, Mark finds he can't escape the life he left behind when Begbie shows up at his front door, and a scheming Sick Boy follows.

NARRATIVE | GENRE

NARRATIVE ARC Mostly Linear

CHARACTER ARC Renton's transformation from drug addict counter culture to accepting dominant hegemonic values

LEVI-STRAUSS' BINARY OPPOSITIONS

England vs Scotland/Young vs old/Drugs vs Clean/Rich vs Poor/Culture vs Counter-Culture/Employed vs Unemployed /Big TVs or Drugs /poverty of Scotland and affluent London. desire vs. logic / drugs vs. sobriety /trust vs. betrayal / action vs. inaction / trapped vs. escape / Are friends more dangerous than heroine?

PROPP Renton (Anti-Hero), Spud (Side-Kick), Begbie (Villain), Sick Boy (Doner), Diane (Princess), Tommy (False-hero)

VOICEOVER Renton is the only narrator in the film; cynical and foul-mouthed commentary captures the exhaustion of generation X. The spectator is aligned to identify with him by the end of the film via direct address

GENRE Drama, comedy film; Hollywood action film in places with camera moving constantly to communicate kinetic energy

LANGUAGE AND MISE EN SCENE

Sound | Lighting | Editing | Cinematography

CINEMATOGRAPHY Worm's eye Low-level movement and framing results in limited perspective and ambition. Renton often framed alone

LIGHTING A grey metropolis of Edinburgh versus bright reds and daylight of London

MISE-EN-SCENE Shabby brown tones of costume and colour palette symbolise drug den. Contrast with London's brighter representation and the beauty of Scotland. Jump cutting during Spud's awkward hyperactive interview working with the sparse mise-en-scène and claustrophobic set to create a comic effect.

EDITING Montage of London, freeze-frames for characters, jump-cuts of Spud's interview (comic relief); editing often creates ironic humour (not social realism) Stylistically excessive representation of London

SOUND Music - Chronological in its appearance in the film and often having some narrative importance in terms of commentating on scenes rather than merely accompanying them. 90s Iggy pop and 1977 songs; eclectic mix; audio journey, punk to rave. Often used ironically e.g. "Perfect Day" (contrapuntal)

PERFORMANCE Slacker generation; Renton is freeze-framed at start – is he trapped? Spud as moral core, Begbie as sociopath / hypocrite

KEY SEQUENCES

Opening 'Lust for Life'

The dilapidated junky drug den (hyperrealism)

Title sequence freeze frames that focus on character's identity and character traits

'The worst toilet in Scotland'

Renton's overdose

Renton is infantilised by his addiction and returned to his parental home

'Scotland is...!'

Resolution when Renton leaves Begbie, Spud and Sick Boy behind and runs off with the money they got from a drug deal

AUTEUR

Danny Boyle (B. England 1956) is one of Britain's highest profile filmmakers – a director of TV and film as well as a Producer. His film work includes the worldwide smash hit *Slumdog Millionaire* (UK, 2009) for which he won, as director, one of its 8 Oscars. In making his first feature film, *Shallow Grave* (UK, 1995) Boyle put together a team of actors and film makers some of whom would go on to make *Trainspotting*. The two films share: director, cinematographer, editor, writer, producer, production company, UK distributor and actors Ewan McGregor, Peter Mullan and Keith Allen. The latter appears in both films as the same drug dealer and *Trainspotting* acts as the prequel to his character's eventual death in *Shallow Grave*. Boyle's status as a national arts icon was cemented when he successfully directed the staging of the 2012 Olympics.

Danny Boyle's stylistic trademarks:

point-of-view shots, high-angle shots, low-angle shots, cameras in impossible places, surreal sequences, strong use of colour, time-lapse sequences, dream sequences and voice-over narration

TERMINOLOGY

IDEOLOGICAL

REPRESENTATION

HEGEMONIC

THATCHERISM

GENERATION X

HYPERREAL/ITY

BINARY OPPOSITIONS

ZEITGEIST

FORMALISM

STRUCTURALISM

PAST EXAM QUESTIONS

How useful has an ideological critical approach been in studying the narratives of your two chosen films? [40]

Or,

'Analysing a film ideologically enhances our understanding.' How far is this true of your two chosen films? [40]