

# Love and Anger. The British New Wave

## Summary

Drawing inspiration from the Angry Young Men literature, documentary projects (by John Grierson, Humphrey Jennings, and Free Cinema), as well as nouvelle vague experiments, British New Wave film directors started to bring a new quality to the cinema of the late 1950s. There was a noticeable mood of social discontent in the films, however, it is impossible to trace its actual source, and so it is in the case of the attitudes of the main characters. The lack of the acceptance of the social norms was the feature which made the British New Wave different from other film projects from that time. European productions from that period are comparable in terms of realistic images, original editing or natural sound, however, certain elements of the world depicted were characteristic of the UK films, and they became a new and consistent trend in the English cinema. Starting from the accent with which the characters spoke, the way the actors dressed (the actors had working – class background, just like the characters they played), the new type of acting (blending into the social background and drawing from individual experience), to natural locations, and the current social problems – all this served the purpose of creating social realism in the cinema of the British New Wave, which was understood in a very original way.

From today's perspective, the most intriguing aspect of the discussed trend is the workshop of the film maker, which remains in contrast to the social realist film and a formal experiment consisting in an aware play with the cinema. The style of the New Wave was not homogenous and, contrary to the suggestions of many researchers, it was not based only on poetical images of reality. It combined the elements of social realism (the life in the post-war England) with the artificiality of the behaviours of the main characters, acting, and the applied technical means. The cinema of the British new wave did not focus on the society, but on its characters (strange, frustrated, finding it hard to live and who were hard to live with). The films were not only the landscapes depicting the working-class North, it was also a very conscious play with the cinema.

This publication includes several areas of research which suggest interpreting the cinema of the British New Wave in relation to social realism, the construction of the main characters, popular culture, plays with cinema characteristic of New Wave. Having looked through the contents, a reader will find out which films, in my opinion, were the most interesting and the most accurately illustrated the discussed issues (among them: *Look Back in Anger* (1959), *Music-hall* (1960), *A Taste of Honey* (1961), *The Loneliness of the Long Distance Runner* (1962) by Tony Richardson, *This Sporting Life* (1963), *If...* (1968) by Lindsay Anderson, *Saturday Night, Sunday Morning*, (1960), *Morgan: A Suitable Case for Treatment* (1966) by Karel Reisz, *A Kind of Loving* (1962), *Billy Liar* (1963), *Darling* (1965) by John Schlesinger, *A Hard Day's Night* (1964) and *The Knack... and How to Get It* (1965) by Richard Lester; other films, such as *Room at the Top* (1959) by Jack Clayton, *The L-shaped Room* by Bryan Forbes (1962), *The Leather Boys* by Sidney J. Furie (1964), *The System* by Michael Winner (1964), *Girl with Green Eyes* by Desmond Davis (1964), *Georgy Girl* by Silvio Narizzano (1966) or *Four in the Morning* by Anthony Simmons (1965), provide the background for the discussed questions. The book is not a mere textbook listing all the films which were made in the period of the New Wave. The aim of the publication was to specify certain areas of research, giving priority to the mechanisms of social realism, but also to the construction of the characters and the essence of their rebellion. British cinema of the late 1950s and early 1960s focused on the character – his frowning forehead (expressing defiance), smirk (ironically sneering at reality), or a smile (accompanying the rare moments of freedom). The everlasting value of this cinema are the faces – of Tom Courtenay, Albert Finney, Rita Tushingham, Judi Dench, Alan Bates, Rachel Roberts, Richard Harris, Richard Burton, Oliver Reed. With time, the social background and the local specificity depicted in the cinema of the new wave, fade away. The contemporary viewer is no longer interested in the social class divisions or the problems of the post-war society. However, what is still striking is the exceptionally intense acting as a part of intriguing filmmaker's workshop solutions which were the essence of new wave cinema.

In the case of numerous research areas mentioned here, scholars frequently confine their attention to a few general sentences, an example of which is the subject of employing the new wave techniques, at that time known mainly from French cinema. The book is also an attempt, not made before, at finding the later references to the new wave. Each subsequent decade of British cinema used *distant voices* of the films of the turn of the 1960s. A certain homogeneity associated with British cinema, in the newer films concern rather the subjects, social specificity, and, frequently understood in a common way, the defiance of the main character (the examples are *Fish Tank* and *Billy Elliot*). The contemporary British film is more likely to perpetuate the clichés of the mainstream and Hollywood cinema, and the film makers are rather unwilling to experiment, unlike the new wave makers, who used to enjoy it. The spirit of the streets and the characters featured in the films are the same, also the pains of the life in the society (its lower strata), and the humour do not change – however, what is lacking is the frenzy which made the film makers of the 1950s and 1960s play with cinema.