Directed and produced by Jack Clayton

Based on the novella “The Turn of the Screw” by Henry James
Screenplay by William Archibald and Truman Capote
Additional scenes and dialogue by John Mortimer
Original Music by Georges Auric
Cinematography by Freddie Francis
Film Editing by Jim Clark
Art Direction by Wilfred Shingleton

Deborah Kerr...Miss Giddens
Peter Wyngarde...Peter Quint
Megs Jenkins...Mrs. Grose
Michael Redgrave...The Uncle
Martin Stephens...Miles
Pamela Franklin...Flora
Clytie Jessop...Miss Jessel
Isla Cameron...Anna


WILLIAM ARCHIBALD (March 7, 1917, Trinidad, British West Indies—December 27, 1970, NYC) has 2 writing credits: The Innocents (1961) and I Confess (1953).


**Clayton—THE INNOCENTS—2**


**GEORGES AURI C** (February 15, 1899, Lodève, Hérault, Languedoc-Roussillon, France—July 23, 1983, Paris, France) has...
of view of a character within a tale allowed him to explore the phenomena of consciousness and perception, and his style in later works has been compared to impressionist painting.

“…His imaginative use of point of view, interior monologue and unreliable narrators in his own novels and tales brought a new depth and interest to realistic fiction, and foreshadowed the modernist work of the twentieth century. An extraordinarily productive writer, in addition to his voluminous works of fiction he published articles and books of travel writing, biography, autobiography, and criticism, and wrote plays, some of which were performed during his lifetime with moderate success.”


British director and producer, born in Brighton, Sussex, 1921 Until he was fifteen he divided his leisure time between prize-winning amateur photography and training as a racing ice skater—he reportedly stood an excellent chance of being chosen for the Olympics. Instead he ran away from his public school to enter the film industry in 1935 joining Alexander Korda’s London Film Productions as a tea-boy. He was soon promoted to third assistant director, a job that Clayton defines as “one how runs messages for everybody, calls the actors, and acts as a general dogsbody.” In this capacity, and later as second assistant, he worked on Prisons Without Bars, Q Planes, The Thief of Baghdad, and Major Barbara, among other films. During the same period he also served as an assistant in the cutting rooms.

In 1940 Clayton enlisted in the Royal Air Force and subsequently joined the RAF Film Unit, serving variously as cameraman, editor, and director of the 1944 documentary Naples is a Battlefield, about the problems of rehabilitating the shattered city—besides directing the film, he supplied the original idea and shot seventy-five percent of the material.

After the war Clayton worked as first assistant director on Anthony Asquith’s While the Sun Shines (1947), as production manager on Alexander Korda’s An Ideal Husband (1948), and as associate producer on a number of notable films including Thelrod Dickinson’s The Queen of Spades (1948), John Huston’s Moulin Rouge (1953) and Beat the Devil (1953, Henry Cornelius’ I Am a Camera (1955), and David Miller’s The Story of Esther Costello (1957), for which he doubled as second unit director. He also produced Gordon Perry’s Sailor Beware, Maurice Elvey’s Dry Rot, Ken Annakin’s Three Men in a Boat, all released in 1956, and John Guillermin’s The Whole Truth (1958).

Meanwhile Clayton was establishing himself as a director of small output but considerable distinction. His first short film, made for a mere £5,000, was released amid general acclamation in 1955. This was The Bespoke Overcoat (which Clayton also produced), adapted by Wolf Mankowitz from a story by Nikolai Gogol. The picture tells of the friendship of two poor Jews in London’s East End, Morry the tailor (David Kossoff) and Fender (Alfie Bass), a frail old clerk who desperately covets one the warm fleece-lined coats that surround him in the warehouse where he has worked for forty-three years. Morry sets about making him a real custom-tailored coat, but before it is finished the old man is fired and dies of the cold. But death does not quiet Fender’s sense of injustice; his ghost returns, and with Morry’s reluctant assistance, filches one of the sheepskin coats from the warehouse.

The critical response for The Bespoke Overcoat was positively rhapsodic. Richard Findlater called this thirty-seven minute black-and-white movie “a splendid film—in a revolutionary kind,” and coupled it with Laurence Olivier’s widescreen Technicolor epic Richard III as “two filmed plays from British studios which must surely be reckoned among the outstanding achievements of postwar cinema.” Leslie Wood was equally enthusiastic: “Producer-director Jack Clayton takes the picture at a tempo which establishes every point of the delightful friendship of the leading characters without undue hurry or overstress. The result is a delightful depiction of human foibles.

He has been well served by his director of photography Wolfgang Suschitsky, who lights the sets in a low key which enhances the otherworldliness of the whole and whose lenses dwell lovingly on textures for their inherent beauty.” This small masterpiece carried off an Oscar as best short, was selected as best short entertainment film at Venice, and received a special award from the British Film Academy—an array of honors that guaranteed its wide release, in spite of its unorthodox length.

Three years later came Clayton’s screen version of John Braine’s best-selling novel Room at the Top, about a young working-class accountant and war veteran (Laurence Harvey) who makes it to the “top” by impregnating the daughter of a rich industrialist. The picture was produced by James Woolf, who with his brother John had established Romulus Films as one of the most enlightened and progressive of postwar British production companies.

British cinema at that times was dominated by genteel and class-bound entertainments that bore very little relationship to the realities of postwar life. The “angry young men” and the kitchen-sink realists” had already launched their revolutions in the novel and the theatre, but with few exceptions the movies continued to deny the existence of a working class whose problems might be given serious attention. As Alexander Walker says, Room at the Top “was the first important and successful film to have as its hero a youth from the working class,” and it permanently altered the social content of British cinema. It was innovative in other ways too, introducing a protagonist who coldbloodedly uses sex to advance himself socially and a girl who acknowledges that sex is actually pleasurable.

By no means all of the British critics welcomed these developments. An anonymous one in the Times complained that the hero, Joe Lampton, “is more of a cad than a card. The members of the town’s upper set...display the most deplorable manners....Still, perhaps, such people exist.” American critics were quicker to appreciate the film. Arthur Knight wrote that its characters “connive, commit adultery like recognizable (and not altogether unlikeable) human beings. And the effect is startling.
One feels that a whole new chapter is about to be written in motion picture history. The film won two Oscars (for Simone Signoret’s moving and deeply sensual performance as Lampton’s tragic mistress, discarded on his way up, and for Neil Paterson’s screenplay), was chosen by the British Film Academy as the Best Picture of the year, and was sensationally successful at the box office.

There is no denying that Room at the Top change the tone and complexion of British cinema in important and necessary ways, but seeing it today, it is hard to believe that it ever seemed revolutionary. In style, it is wholly traditional, and its theme, as Clayton was the first to point out, “is not different from those treated by Stendahl and Dreiser, among others”; the director himself said some years later that he did not “think very much” of the film, but “there was something in the air at the time that was right for it.” John Braine’s hero is eager to join the establishment, not to overthrow it, and the movie scrupulously follows its model. In fact, as Alexander Walker says, “Clayton was a traditionalist, as his subsequent films showed, working inside the British school of fine craftsmanship. He had a well-developed...moral sensibility towards his material, but no apparent social or political allegiance whatsoever.”

Clayton had seized on Braine’s novel more because he thought it “truthful about relationships between people” than because of its social concerns. In this almost accidental way he had gained an international reputation as the pioneer of a socially conscious “new wave” in Britain. It was a role he did not care for, as his next picture made clear. After turning down a flood of offers over the next three years, he chose a subject that could hardly have been more remote from the grimy provincial naturalism of Room at the Top—a screen version of Henry James’ quietly chilling ghost story The Turn of the Screw. It deals with a governess (Deborah Kerr) who finds herself struggling for the souls of the two children in her care against the corrupt and malevolent spirits of her predecessor and that woman’s lover.

As Isabel Quigley wrote, “from Braine to James yawn such vast gaps of temperament, age, style, and outlook that you wonder how Clayton has got inside James’s skin enough to make you feel him, not so much in the dialogue (though that, by William Archibald, Truman Capote, and John Mortimer, is extremely and quite unobtrusively good), as visually, in a walk, a moment, a hand, the light, the curtains shuffling, everything before you in its mannered, secret, and alarming way.” And John Coleman thought that “Georges Auric’s score nicely alternated with animal noises and silence, and the brilliant photography of Freddie Francis, sharp and hazy by turns, make this an exhilarating piece of high-class hokum.” But not everyone was satisfied with the film. Some critics thought that Clayton had failed to make up his mind whether the two ghosts were to be regarded as “real” or as the products of the repressed heroine’s imagination; this ambiguity, it was suggested, had spilled over into the imagery, which ranges from stock gothic effects to genuinely disturbing touches (a beetle trickling out of the mouth of a stone Cupid; a little boy’s goodnight kiss for his governess that turns into an adult and passionate one).

Another three years passed before this “choosy” and eclectic director found his next subject in The Pumpkin Eater (1964), Penelope Mortimer’s novel about a much-married woman who is a compulsive bearer of children—indeed, having children is both a justification of her life and an escape from its uglier contingencies. The story, splendidly adapted by Harold Pinter, centers on her fourth marriage, which is threatened by the infidelity of her screenwriter husband. Anne Bancroft and Peter Finch play the lead roles and there is a haunting score by Georges Delerue.

The Pumpkin Eater received British Film academy awards for best actress and best black-and-white photography. Philip Oakes wrote that “almost alone among British directors Clayton uses poetry both as a cutting tool and as a salve to make the hurt flesh whole. He does not fumble. He knows what he is about. The Pumpkin Eater is his most complex, most deeply felt film and —without reservations—it is a triumph.” A reviewer in the Times agreed that the movie was “solid, serious, intelligent, stylish,” but concluded that “it is also, for the most part, quite dead.” There were many shades of opinion between these two extremes but the public, for the most part, stayed away from this British exercise in the style of Antonioni. Clayton, who believes that it is critically important for a work of art to be offered at the right “psychological moment,” thought it “a rather good film” but suspected that its time-juggling script and adventurous camerawork was ahead of its time, and there is some evidence that this view is correct.

After another three-year silence came Clayton’s fourth feature, Our Mother’s House. Yet another literary adaptation, it was based on Julian Glaog’s novel about a family of children who, fearful of being sent to an orphanage when their mother dies, bury her in the garden and make a shrine of her grave. This bizarre plot begins to go awry when their wayward father turns up. Clayton coproduced the movie for MGM with Martin Ransohoff. He cast Dirk Bogarde as the father and elicited excellent performances from the children, and the film was chosen as the official British entry in the Venice Film Festival. But again there were mixed reviews and the picture was another financial failure. Ann Pacey wrote that Clayton, “using colour for the first time, broods in eerie closeups over a home so obsessed with religious fanaticism and death that sickness becomes almost tangible. The main trouble with the film is that in spite of its ability to grip and chill it remains obstinately unbelievable and unconvincing.”

Clayton’s most ambitious film followed after an even longer interval than usual, several abortive projects having been abandoned along the way. His $6.5 million remake of Scott Fitzgerald’s The Great Gatsby (1974) has a screenplay by Francis Coppola, photography by Douglas Slocombe, design and costumes by John Box and Theoni Aldredge. Jay Gatsby (Robert Redford) had long ago been jilted by the spoiled, lovely Daisy (Mia Farrow). Having made an illicit fortune, he takes a house on Long Island, just across the bay from where Daisy is living with her boorish husband (Bruce Dern). Gatsby had not been rich enough or polished enough for Daisy; now he is at least rich, as he demonstrates by holding a string of colossal parties that he never bothers to attend. As trivial (and as beautiful) as ever, Daisy is impressed and for a little while won by this romantic gangster. But in the end she and her husband unite to protect themselves at
the outsider’s expense, and Gatsby is shot dead in his own swimming pool, a victim of mistaken identity.

As Fitzgerald recognized, his greatest book is short on motivation and works more like a poem than a novel. It is virtually unfilmable, and Clayton’s careful, lengthy adaptation does not begin to solve the problems it presents. The result was very harshly treated by many reviewers. However, Penelope Giliatt found much to admire in this “slow, graceful film” and so did Nigel Andrews, who thought the early scenes, at least, had been “done faithfully and atmospherically.” But even Andrews found it “a film that gives us too long to digest the rich period atmosphere—endless summer afternoons, endless parties, endless sequences wandering through the Twenties opulence of Gatsby’s mansion—and too little of the story….After a promising beginning, Clayton’s film leaves precious little echoing in our minds except the pretty period images and the bouncy period music.”

In his seventh feature film, Something Wicked This Way Comes (1983), a Walt Disney production with a screenplay based by Ray Bradbury on his own novel of the same title (1962), Clayton returned to a subject that had engaged him in his adaptation of Henry James—the relation between childish innocence and adult corruption. Once again Clayton mixes cliches of cinematic horror with disturbing and original special effects, and once again critical response was generally too literal-minded to appreciate the complexity of the task he had set himself. Using the small-town setting characteristic of horror movies, Clayton narrates a Faustian fable in which a carnival run by a Mephistophelean showman (Jonathan Pryce) and a siren temptress (Pam Grier) offers to fulfill the desires of its patrons at the cost of their lives and souls. Parallel to this conventional but expertly managed plot runs the psychological drama of the town librarian and his son (Jason Robards and Vidal Peterson). In the course of thwarting the evil designs of the carnival, the librarian’s son and his friend (Shawn Carson) acquire an understanding of their elders.

A writer in Film Dope has suggested that Clayton’s central theme is “the collision of innocence with corruption,” but Clayton himself says that “there is no pattern to my pattern” and, elsewhere, that he is “totally intuitive in everything about filmmaking. I don’t work by intelligence; I have to feel it, not think it. If I make the illusion work for me, the feeling is the victory.” Penelope Huston says that “Clayton is one of the perfectionists: an interpretive director, rather than one of those who creates from the ground up, but also a filmmaker who would rather take his own line than get caught up on any of the treadmills.”

A shy, lanky man, Clayton has been married twice, to Christine Norden and to Katherine Kath: both marriages were dissolved. He speaks very quietly and Douglas Keay says that “you’re surprised, and then somehow not at all surprised, to hear he has a violent temper.” He loves “all kinds of music, old jazz, the classics, any music” and pursues the characteristically unconventional hobby of pigeon breeding.


...His penchant for themes of melancholy, frustration, obsession, hallucination, and hauntings are also amply evident.

Clayton attracted much critical praise, and an Academy Award, with The Bespoke Overcoat, a “long short” brought in for £5000; writer Wolf Mankowitz adapted Gogol’s tale of a haunted tailor to London’s East End. Clayton’s first feature was Room at the Top, from John Braine’s novel. Laurence Harvey played the ambitious young Northerer who sacrifices his true love, played by Simone Signoret, to a cynical career-move, impregnating an industrialist’s innocent daughter. Its sexual frankness (as the first “quality” film to carry the new X certificate) and its class consciousness (its use of brand names being as snobbery-conscious as James Bond’s—though lower class) elicited powerful audience self-recognition. It marked a major breakthrough for British cinema, opening it to other “angry young men” with their “kitchen-sink realism” and social indignation (though politically more disparate than legend has it).

Clayton kept his distance from such trends, turning down both Saturday Night and Sunday Morning and The L-Shaped Room, to select a very “literary,” Victorian, ghost story, The Innocents, from Henry James’s The Turn of the Screw. Deborah Kerr played the children’s governess who sees ghosts by sunlight while battling to save her charges from possession by the souls of two evil, and very sexual, servants. Is the lonely governess imagining everything, or projecting her own evil? The Pumpkin-Eater adapted Penelope Mortimer’s novel about a mother of eight (Anne Bancroft) whose new husband, a film scriptwriter, bullies her into having a hysterectomy. In Our Mother’s House, a family of children conceal their mother’s death from the authorities to continue living as a family—until their scapegrace father (Dirk Bogarde) returns and takes over, introducing, not so much “reality,” as his, displeasurable, reality.

The three films are all but a trilogy brooding with “haunted realism” over the psychic chaos between parental—especially mother—figures and children caught in half-knowledge of sexuality, death, and individuality. Atmospheres sluggish or turbulent, strained or cavernous, envelope women or child-women enmeshed in tangles of family closeness and loneliness. If The Innocents arraigns Victorian fears of childhood sexuality, it acknowledges also the evil in children. The Pumpkin-Eater balances assumptions of “excessive” maternal instinct being a neurotic defense by raising the question of whether modern superficiality is brutally intolerant of maternal desire. Our Mother’s House concerns a “lost tribe” of children, caught between the modern, “small family” world, infantile over-severity (with dangers of a Lord of the Flies situation) and adult.
Clayton’s “family trilogy” achieves a strange osmosis of 1940s “lyrical realism” and a more “calligraphic” sensitivity, of strong material and complicated interactions between profoundly different people. The resultant tensions between a central subjectivity and “the others,” emphasise the dark, confused, painful, gaps between minds. If the films border on the “absurdist” experience (Pinter adapted the Mortimer), they retain the richness of “traditional” themes and forms. Critics (and collaborators) keenly discussed shifts between Mortimer’s first person narration and the camera as third person, and the relegation of Fitzgerald’s narrator to onlooker status. Even in the lesser films, “shifting emphases” (between gloss and core in Gatsby, space and emotion in Wicked) repay reseeing, and Clayton’s combinations of fine literary material with a troubling temperament make powerful testimony to their time and to abiding human problems.

Full text of Henry James’s “The Turn of the Screw” is online at http://etext.virginia.edu/toc/modeng/public/JamTurn.html

COMING UP IN BUFFALO FILM SEMINARS XVIII:
Feb 17 Akira Kurosawa HIGH AND LOW/TENGOKU TO JIGOKU 1963
Feb 24 Ján Kadar & Elmar Klos THE SHOP ON MAIN STREET/OBCHOD NA KORZE 1966
March 3 Jean-Pierre Melville LE CERCLE ROUGE 1970
March 17 Robert Altman, THE LONG GOODBYE, 1973
March 24 Andrei Tarkovsky: NOSTALGHIA1983
March 31 Larisa Shepitko THE ASCENT/VOSKHOZHDENIYE 1977
April 7 Warren Beatty REDS 1981
April 14 32 SHORT FILMS ABOUT GLENN GOULD
April 21 Pedro Almodóvar ALL ABOUT MY MOTHER/TODO SOBRE MI MADRE 1999

3 X 3 @ AKAG
THURSDAY EVENINGS AT THE ALBRIGHT-KNOX

The Albright-Knox Art Gallery is presenting an international film series on Thursday evenings. Entitled 3 X 3 @ AKAG, this new series is being organized and presented by University at Buffalo professors Bruce Jackson and Diane Christian and features three films by three distinguished international film directors each month: Jean Renoir (1894–1979) in February, Federico Fellini (1920–1993) in March, and Yasujirō Ozu (1903–1963) in April. Screenings are free with Gallery admission and will begin at 7:30 pm in the Gallery auditorium. Prior to the film each week, Jackson and Christian will introduce the film and briefly discuss the filmmaker’s career and historical influence. After the screening, they will join the audience in a discussion of the film, the filmmaker, and the impact of both on world cinema and other arts. The scheduled films are:

FEBRUARY – FEATURED DIRECTOR: JEAN RENOIR
February 5 – Grand Illusion, 1937
This week: February 12 – La Bête Humaine, 1938

MARCH – FEATURED DIRECTOR: FEDERICO FELLINI
March 5 – I Vitelloni, 1953
March 19 – 8½, 1963
March 26 – Juliet of the Spirits, 1965

APRIL – FEATURED DIRECTOR: YASUJIRÔ OZU
April 9 – Late Spring, 1949
April 16 – Tokyo Story, 1953
April 23 – Floating Weeds, 1959

CONTACTS:
...email Diane Christian: engdc@buffalo.edu
...email Bruce Jackson bjackson@buffalo.edu
...for the series schedule, annotations, links and updates: http://buffalofilmseminars.com
...to subscribe to the weekly email informational notes, send an email to addto list@buffalofilmseminars.com
....for cast and crew info on any film: http://imdb.com/

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