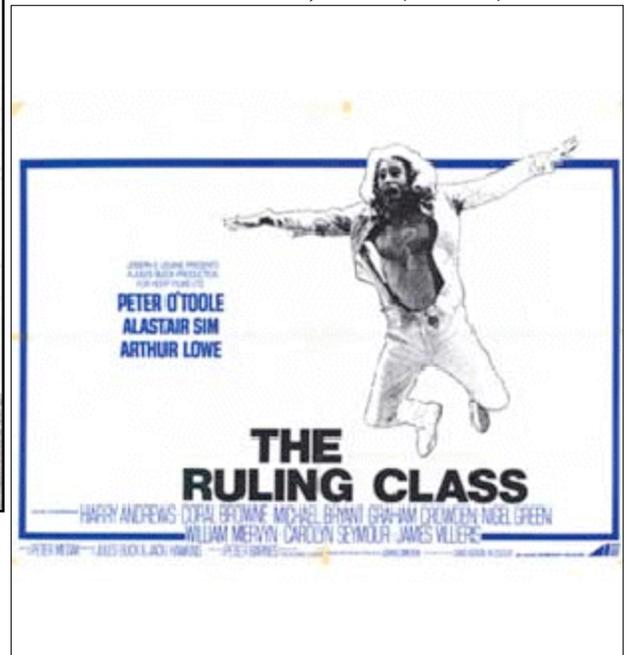
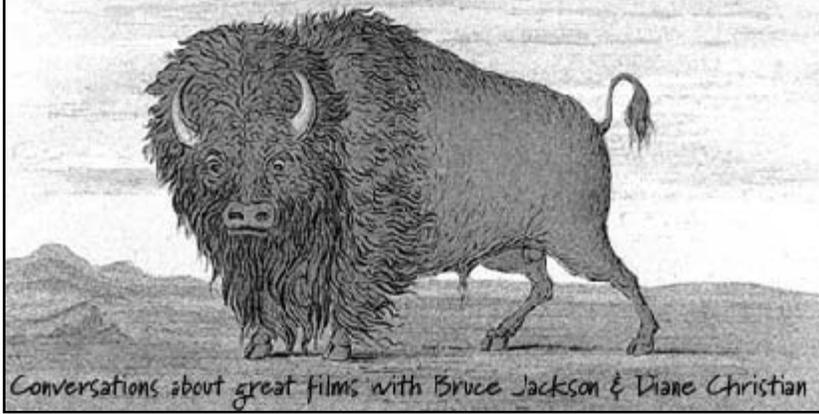


The Buffalo Film Seminars



Peter Medak (23 December 1937, Budapest). From *The Film Encyclopedia*, 4th Edition. Ephraim Katz (revised by Fred Klein & Ronald Dean Nolen). Harper 2001 NY: "Born Dec. 23, 1937, in Budapest.

Escaping Hungary following the crushing of the 1956 uprising, he entered the British film industry that same year as a trainee at AB-Pathe. Following a long apprenticeship in the sound, editing, and camera departments, he became an assistant director, then a second-unit director on action pictures. He started directing TV films for Universal in 1963 and theatrical features in 1968. Medak reached the high point of his career early, in 1972 with the release of two highly acclaimed black comedies: the sincerely human *A Day in the Death of Joe Egg* and the robustly irreverent *The Ruling Class* (1972). A California resident since the early 80s, he still works frequently in Europe. Along with his features and several TV movies, both in Britain and the US, he also directed the operas 'Salome' in Minneapolis and 'La Voix humaine' in Paris. FILMS INCLUDE: *Negatives* 1968; *A Day in the Death of Joe Egg*, *The Ruling Class* 1972; *Ghost in the Noonday Sun* 1974; *The Odd Job* 1978; *The Changeling* (Can.) 1980; *Zorro the Gay Blade* (US) 1981; *The Men's Club* (US) 1986; *The Krays* 1990; *Let Him Have It* 1991; *Beverly Hills Cop III* (act. Only), *Pontiac Moon*, *Romeo is Bleeding* 1994; *Species 2* 1998." Medak has done a lot of TV series work, e.g., "Law & Order: Special Victims Unit" (1999), "Homicide: Life on the Street" (1993), "China Beach" (1988), "Beauty and the Beast" (1987), "Magnum, P.I." (1980), "Hart to Hart" (1979).

PETER O'TOOLE (2 August 1932, Connemara, County Galway, Ireland) Biography from Leonard Maltin's *Movie Encyclopedia*:

"Slender, blond, blue-eyed Irish actor who brings passion and intensity to his screen characters, more than a few of whom have been wildeyed visionaries. A graduate of London's Royal Academy of Dramatic Art and an acclaimed Shakespearean actor, O'Toole debuted on film in *The Savage Innocents* (1959), but shot to stardom in the title role of *Lawrence of Arabia* (1962), earning an Academy Award nomination to boot. It's possible he'll always be associated with the role of T. E. Lawrence (though, ironically, he was a secondary choice, replacing Albert Finney); his intensely credible portrayal of this desert dreamer is one of the most dynamic in movie history. He's had no trouble moving on, however, to other larger-than-life roles, and has in fact earned another six Oscar nominations for playing King Henry II in both *Becket* (1964, opposite Richard Burton) and *The Lion in Winter* (1968, opposite Katharine Hepburn), the shy schoolteacher in the musical *Goodbye, Mr. Chips* (1969), a wacked-out British lord who thinks he's Jesus Christ in *The Ruling Class* (1972), maniacal movie director Eli Cross (inspired, O'Toole said, by David Lean) in *The Stunt Man* (1980), and washed-up, Errol Flynn-ish movie swashbuckler Alan Swann in the sweetly comic *My Favorite Year* (1982)....An admitted alcoholic, O'Toole squandered his fame (and, some say, his talent) on many projects clearly beneath his abilities. Nonetheless, he remains a compulsively watchable actor whose presence brings color (and some measure of respectability) to any film or TV project in which he appears. In 1985 he lent his voice to a series of animated features about Sherlock Holmes. Among his television ventures: the miniseries "Masada" (1981), a 1983 remake of *Svengali* with Jodie Foster, a 1984 remake of *Kim*, *Crossing to Freedom* (1990), and *The Dark Angel* (1992). In 1992 he published his first volume of memoirs, "Loitering With Intent," which was greeted with rave reviews. OTHER FILMS INCLUDE: 1960: *Kidnapped*, *The Day They Robbed the Bank of England* 1965: *Lord Jim*, *What's New, Pussycat?* 1966: *How to Steal a Million*, *The Bible* 1967:*Night of the Generals*, *Casino Royale* (just a cameo); 1968: *Great Catherine* 1969: *Brotherly Love* 1971: *Murphy's War* 1972: *Man of La Mancha* 1973: *Under Milk Wood* 1975: *Rosebud* 1976: *Man Friday* 1978: *Power Play* 1979: *Zulu Dawn* 1980: *Caligula* 1984: *Supergirl* 1985: *Creator* 1986: *Club Paradise* 1987: *The Last Emperor* 1988: *High Spirits* 1990: *Wings of Fame* 1991: *King Ralph* 1993: *The Seventh Coin*." And, after Maltin's 1993 note, O'Toole did a bunch of made-for-tv

THE RULING CLASS, 1972, 154 min.

Directed by Peter Medak
 Written by Peter Barnes (based on his play)
 Produced by Jules Buck and Jack Hawkins
 Original Music by John Cameron
 Non-Original Music by Edward Elgar (from "Pomp and Circumstance") and Arthur Sullivan (hymn "Onward, Christian Soldiers")
 Cinematography by Ken Hodges
 Film Editing by Ray Lovejoy

Peter O'Toole.... Jack Arnold
 Alexander Tancred Gurney, 14th Earl of Gurney
 Alastair Sim.... Bishop Lampton
 Arthur Lowe.... Daniel Tucker
 Harry Andrews.... 13th Earl of Gurney
 Coral Browne.... Lady Claire Gurney
 Michael Bryant.... Dr. Herder
 Nigel Green.... McKyle
 William Mervyn.... Sir Charles Gurney
 Carolyn Seymour.... Grace Shelley

films, among them "Gulliver's Travels" (1996) in which he played the Emperor of Lilliput, "Joan of Arc" 1999 in which he played Bishop Cauchon, "Hitler: the Rise of Evil" in which he played Paul von Hindenburg, and "Augustus" (2003) in which he played Augustus. He was also in a number of films, the most recent of which are *Bright Young Things* (2003), *Troy* (scheduled for release next year; he plays Priam), and *Closing the Ring*, which is now in pre-production. Noel Coward famously said to him, "If you'd been any prettier, it would have been Florence of Arabia." O'Toole somewhere said, "I can't stand light. I hate weather. My idea of heaven is moving from one smoke-filled room to another." And, another time, "The only exercise I take is walking behind the coffins of friends who took exercise."

PETER BARNES (1931, London), based the screenplay on his highly-successful stage play of the same name. Some of his other plays are *Red Noses*, *The Bewitched*, *Laughter*, *Auschwitz*, and *Dreaming*. You can find more about him on his website, www.peterbarnes.com.

ALISTAIR SIM (9 October 1900, Edinburgh—19 August 1976, London (cancer). **From IMDB:** "The son of Alexander Sim JP and Isabella McIntyre, Alastair Sim was educated in Edinburgh. Always interested in language (especially the spoken word) he became the Fulton Lecturer in Elocution at New College, Edinburgh University from 1925 until 1930. He was invited back and became the Rector of Edinburgh University (1948 - 1951). His first stage appearance was as Messenger in Othello at the Savoy Theatre, London. He went on to create some of the most memorable (usually comedic) roles in British films from 1936 until his death in 1976." **Biography from Leonard Maltin's Movie Encyclopedia:** "If he'd never played any character other than Scrooge in the 1951 *A Christmas Carol* (surely the definitive screen version of that oft-filmed Dickens tale), this lanky, pop-eyed, rubber-faced character actor would rate a spot in this book. A former elocution teacher (not surprising, considering the precision of that deliciously rich voice), Sim worked on stage in Britain during the 1930s before appearing in his first film, *The Case of Gabriel Perry* in 1935. Very busy on-screen from that time on, most often in supporting, comedic roles, he stole scenes right and left...He achieved star status in the postwar period; *Green for Danger* (1946), one of the classiest whodunits ever made, starred Sim as Inspector Cockrill, a saucy detective who very nearly bungles a murder investigation. He played a frazzled headmaster of a prep school in *The Happiest Days of Your Life* Jane Wyman's father in Hitchcock's *Stage Fright* (both 1950), a girl's school headmistress (!) and her brother in *The Belles of St. Trinian's* (1954, and a 1957 sequel, *Blue Murder at St. Trinian's* another detective, albeit one with a strange secret, in *An Inspector Calls* (1954), and a laughable clergyman in *The Ruling Class* (1972), among many others. He remained active on stage throughout his life." Trivia from IMDB: "Was awarded the CBE. He was also offered a knighthood but turned it down because it would impinge too much on his privacy. Was made the rector of Edinburgh University in 1948. Appeared in 61 films and 46 West End productions. He met his wife 'Naomi Plaskitt' when they both appeared in a stage production of "The Land of Heart's Desire" by William Butler Yeats. He was 27, she was 12. They married when Naomi was 18. When he was made Rector of Edinburgh University, he beat Harold Macmillan (the future Prime Minister) by 2078 votes to 802."

Magill's Survey of Cinema, 15 Jun 1995.

One of the most outrageous, offensive, and magnificent film satires was unleashed upon the public in 1972, in **THE RULING CLASS**. The British feature merrily exposed the depravity of the English aristocracy, the hypocrisy of organized religion, and that heinous animal that is man. Flamboyantly directed by Peter Medak and starring Peter O'Toole, it became one of the most controversial films of the 1970's and one of the most wicked satires in cinema history.

The film opens to expose the favorite nocturnal perversity of the 13th Earl of Gurney (Harry Andrews). Relaxing after thundering a law-and-order speech in London, he returns to the bedroom of his magnificent estate; dons long underwear, a ballet tu-tu, and a three-cornered hat; puts his head in a silk noose; and swings about his bedroom. On this night, however, preaches love, rides a tricycle, claims he is wed to the Lady of the Camellias, and plans to give away the Gurney fortune.

Sir Charles takes action. Hoping to institutionalize Jack again after he has fathered a new heir, he schemes to wed Jack to his own mistress, socially ambitious Grace Shelley (Carolyn Seymour). When she first meets her proposed bridegroom, she is dressed as Camille and singing a selection from **LA TRAVIATA**. Grace soon falls in love with Jack, however, and informs him of Sir Charles' plot. Jack forgives her, rides his tricycle into her marriage boudoir, and impregnates her. On the night their son is born, psychiatrist Dr. Herder (Michael Bryant) brings to the estate McKyle (Nigel Green), a raving lunatic who believes he is the "Electric Christ." Claiming that the true God is a God of wrath for "strong stomachs," the "High Voltage Messiah" chews glass bottles, horrifies Jack with a terrible repertoire of electronic shocks, and traumatizes the heir

he tips over the ladder on which he usually alights and hangs himself. There is shock when Bishop Lampton (Alastair Sim) reads the will. To the Earl's brother Sir Charles (William Mervyn), Charles' spouse Lady Claire (Coral Browne), and their feeble-minded son Dinsdale (James Villiers), he leaves nothing. Aside from thirty thousand pounds for the butler Tucker (Arthur Lowe) — who promptly begins drinking and insulting the family — the title and estate will pass entirely to the Earl's son Jack (Peter O'Toole), who has spent the past eight years in a lunatic asylum.

Jack arrives at the estate sporting a beard, flowing blonde hair, monk's robes, and tennis shoes. He is convinced that he is Jesus Christ. To the family's horror, Jack soon places a huge wooden cross in the living room upon which he habitually hangs. He also until he no longer believes he is Jesus Christ.

Instead, Jack now believes he is Jack the Ripper. As the Ripper, he knifes Lady Claire and blames the murder on Tucker; drives Sir Charles, Dr. Herder, and Bishop Lampton to an asylum; takes a seat at the House of Lords, where he delivers a speech in praise of bigotry and vengeance that wins a standing ovation from his peers; and returns to the estate, where he promptly kills his loving wife Grace. The baby, obviously inheriting the family curse, cries out "I AM JACK!" as the film ends.

THE RULING CLASS was Britain's official entry at the 1972 Cannes Film Festival. United Artists secured rights for release in the United States, but when that corporation announced plans to edit extensively the 154-minute feature, the producers balked, and Avco Embassy obtained the rights. In the fall of 1972, **THE RULING CLASS** had its premiere in the United

States (trimmed of only six minutes and rated "R") and created enormous controversy. NEWSWEEK condemned the film as "sledgehammer satire" and "odious," while VARIETY lauded it as "brilliantly caustic"; NEW YORK praised it as "fantastic fun," and the LOS ANGELES TIMES derided it as "... snail-slow, slag-heavy, shrill and gesticulating."

Indeed, *THE RULING CLASS* is more than satire; it is a celluloid nightmare, absurd, horrible, fascinating, and disturbing. Director Peter Medak crams the picture with riveting nonsense: a gorilla crashes through a window to tip his hat; O'Toole bursts into a duet of "My Blue Heaven" with Seymour or leads fox hunters in an evangelistic rendition of "Dem Bones." The film rampages from silly humor to repellent spectacle to true horror. Yet the film is saved from total distaste by the artistry of the cast: the beautifully "bitchy" Browne, who caustically portrays Lady Claire; Lowe as the ever unruffled Tucker; and Mervyn as the glowering Sir Charles. Sir Charles delivers the film's most outrageous line: finding the corpse of his slain wife on the floor, he looks into the camera and intones, "Very well. Who is the impudent clown responsible for this?" with the controlled wrath of a schoolmaster.

The most outstanding performance is O'Toole's. As "Jesus Christ," outfitted with a girlishly curly blonde wig, he is both divinely mad and poignantly heartbreaking; as Jack the Ripper, shorn of his locks and icily austere, he is a bloodthirsty, terrifying obscenity. TIME praised O'Toole's 14th Earl of Gurney as "a performance of such intensity that it may trouble sleep as surely as it will haunt memory — funny, disturbing, finally devastating." For his incredible performance that was miraculously free of blasphemy and awesomely filled with bravado, O'Toole received his fifth Academy Best Actor nomination, but the 1972 Oscar went to Marlon Brando for his performance in *THE GODFATHER*.

THE RULING CLASS did not prove to be an exceptional box-office success. It employs a type of satire not to all moviegoers' liking. At times it demands audience attention in the manner that a snake enraptures a doomed bird, and its statement that a Jack the Ripper would be more assured of success in the contemporary world than would Jesus Christ is by no means a comfortable one. Yet for its excesses, the picture has more than its share of creativity, imagination, and flair. *THE RULING CLASS* remains an unforgettably chilling cinema lampoon, perhaps best described by O'Toole as "a comedy with tragic relief."

John Simon "The Ruling Class" (NY Times 1972)

Seldom have I had to revise my opinion of a film upward on seeing it a second time only a few days later. But *THE RULING CLASS*, which is well worth seeing once, seems to me wickedly persuasive the second time around. The jokes, amusing the first time, become more clearly purposive the second; even the seemingly deficient discipline and overabundant length reveal a perverse cogency and insidious logic. That second time, as the lights went up, I looked everywhere for my objections - under my seat and all the neighboring ones - but I could not find them....

Mike Pinsky review

Although insane, Jack quickly becomes the moral center of the film. Even after his identity transfers from Jesus to Jack the

Ripper—from the God of Love to God of Vengeance—we still find ourselves struggling to empathize with him and his attempts to find sense in a world which insists on pressuring him into conformity. "I must learn to keep my mouth shut, bowels open and never volunteer," he seethes. He longs to please, to conform to others' standards in order to make them love him. He proudly joins a foxhunt and offers an observation on the true nature of colonialism: "I recall, as a sign of normalcy, our circle to slaughter anything that moves." Is it any wonder that he finds himself (as Jack the Ripper) accepted wholeheartedly by his upper-class peers, the lords of an empire of corpses? *The Ruling Class*, like most successful satire, swings wildly from joy to terror. Peter Barnes' screenplay borrows from absurdist theater and contemporary psychedelic pop culture. . . but also Brecht and Artaud.

James Kindred review

With its irreverent use of pastiche to achieve irony and parody *The Ruling Class* is decidedly postmodern several years before it became a buzzword.

Michael Hollinger: PETER BARNES: IMPUDENT CLOWN

At a key dramatic moment in Peter Barnes' anarchic comedy *THE RULING CLASS*, an indignant character turns to the audience and explodes, "All right, who's the impudent clown responsible for this?"

A good question — especially here, where the plays of this impudent clown are staged less often than in his native England. Because his is not a household name, it's easy for us to underestimate the stature and influence of his subversively funny playwright, whose extreme, audacious work has goaded British complacency for three decades and influenced many of his contemporaries. In addition to having authored dozens of original works for the stage — encompassing full-lengths, one-acts, and adaptations of plays by Feydeau, Wedekind, and others — Barnes has also written extensively for radio, television, and film, including the screenplays for *HEART OF A DOG* and *ENCHANTED APRIL*, which earned him an Academy Award nomination. His first major play, *THE RULING CLASS*, was recently optioned for a major revival at London's Royal National Theatre next year.

Which is not to say that Peter Barnes is universally loved and admired. On the contrary, his contribution to modern theater remains violently debated, a fact about which he remains philosophical. "I think any true artist must speak with his own voice and then accept the fact that it's going to divide people," he has said. "With bland voices, the reactions are never as strong as to somebody with something very individual."

What's individual about Barnes' work is its bold theatricality, its extravagant language, its unflinching portrayal of human brutishness, and its skepticism of social, political, and religious institutions. Perhaps most individual of all is his humor, which alternately tickles and impales. Sometimes it appalls as well, challenging audiences' notions about what can be laughed at by making them laugh at it anyway. Philadelphia-area productions in recent memory include the short plays *NOT AS BAD AS THEY SEEM* and *MORE THAN A TOUCH OF ZEN* (which derive much of their humor from characters who are blind and palsied, respectively), and university productions

of the comedies RED NOSES (which deals with the misuses of power during the Black Plague) and LAUGHTER (part of which is set in a Nazi death camp).

Peter Barnes' screenplay for ENCHANTED APRIL (1992) was nominated for an Academy Award.—Though his work is not frequently produced in the United States, Barnes actually prefers American audiences to their British counterparts. "I've always found that Americans instinctively are a more receptive audience," he asserts. "The English basically like the same things that they were given in the 1930s; they're still stuck, to a great extent, in the 1930s. Generally, American audiences don't go to a theater with preconceived ideas. They go in with the attitude 'Show me, and I'll tell you if I like it or not.' I think that means they can respond to things that are different and fresh."

Ironically, in his quest for a theater that is different and fresh, Barnes has often looked backward for inspiration: to Brecht, with his dogged commitment to educate as well as entertain; to theater visionary Antonin Artaud, for his passion and extremity; and especially to the great Jacobian playwrights, such as Ben Jonson, Thomas Middleton, and Christopher Marlowe. "Not Shakespeare," he adds, "because Shakespeare can't influence anybody. He's on his own, as it were."

Despite its sometimes anarchic nature, Barnes' comedy has very clear targets. It explodes beneath the royal thrones, papal seats, judicial benches, and occasionally even our own comfy chairs in the theater, but no innocent bystanders are ever wounded. For Barnes is a humanist — and optimist — at heart. "I've always said that the reason I write plays is to change the world," he says. "Well, thirty years on, I haven't changed it; probably not at all. However, that doesn't mean to say you shouldn't keep trying. These things take aeons of time to really change, the deep, deep changes. And so, if nothings seems to have changed, one mustn't despair; one just carries on and keeps working."

As rehearsals for THE RULING CLASS began at the Wilma, I spoke with Peter Barnes by phone.

Michael Hollinger: To what degree is THE RULING CLASS a product of its origins — England in the late 1960s? Are its targets as viable now as then?

Peter Barnes: Unfortunately, it's as valid today as it was when it was written. And I say that with deep regret, because the class system's still very, very prevalent over here. In the deepest sense, I hope the play is always relevant because repression always has to be watched and attacked. And freedom, not only freedom of speech, but freedom of the spirit, always has to be encouraged and made relevant by writers. But even the surface material — about class, privilege, cowtowing, servility, the inability of the English to throw off old, worn-out institutions and attitudes — is unfortunately very relevant. Of course, the wider aspects of freedom, liberty, oppression, and incipient fascism are just as relevant to America and its right-wing redneck attitudes towards civil liberties and spiritual liberties.

MH: Why do you suppose the English are less receptive than Americans to your work in particular?

PB: I always try to give a three-course meal, and the English like two courses or one course. American's like their money's worth, and I guess that's one of the reasons why they're more responsive to my work.

MH: When you refer to a three-course meal, do you mean ideas as well as entertainment?

PB: Absolutely. I try to give entertainment — songs, dances,

humor. And I also try to give something more in the sense of ideas and an attitude to life, which I think is tremendously important.

MH: These entertainment elements are all over THE RULING CLASS, creating a sort of vaudeville effect at times. Do you have a background in the British music hall tradition or other popular entertainments?

PB: My parents had stalls on the piers at Clacton-on-Sea, which is a sort of Coney Island place. They did those games you used to do in fairgrounds where you throw hoops over vases or ping pong balls through clowns' mouths to get prizes. I don't know if this rates as entertainment, but it did have certain grounding in that. And I guess it comes through in the sense that I like that sort of "carnival rowdiness" from time to time in my plays.

MH: Could you talk a bit about the use of songs in your work?

PB: The thing about THE RULING CLASS is that it was the first one to do that — to bring songs into a straight play and make it integral. Other people copied it afterwards, so now it's much more familiar, but when I did it, it was the first time it had ever been done. And the reaction was one of great puzzlement; people thought I'd got my wires crossed somewhere. But now it's much more acceptable, so I've moved on from that.

MH: Obviously, though they sometimes break out of a given scene, these musical forays function as something more than mere non sequiturs.

PB: I believe that there are some moments in theater ere the pressure of the emotion gets so strong that the only thing you can do is sing. It's like opera, only with opera, people are singing all the time. That's what I'm against, and that's why I'm against modern musicals, because they sing all the time. If you come in and starting singing, "I got the train from wherever and I had to walk and it's raining," that really is ridiculous. Whereas if you're under great emotion or stress, it somehow seems to me that you have to find another way of expressing yourself. That's what songs can do — they are emotions depicted on the stage in their most vivid form. So out of either love, or hate, or embarrassment, or some other emotion, my characters start singing or dancing. And to me, that's perfectly valid. That's what one's always looking for — some way of targeting the heart and emotions of an audience, and making the arrow whiz through the air and hit them.

MH: Have you ever written anything in which humor was not a major component?

PB: My last play didn't have much humor in it; it's a bit more melancholic, actually. It's much more difficult to start laughing as the years pass and not much changes for the better.

However, I am a humorist. I am a comedy writer. The most important thing about comedy — and this is terribly important — is that comedy is not something you put in to "sweeten the pill" of the message. Comedy is the message. And the trouble with a lot of comic writers is the fact that they do a bit of comedy and then they stick a bit of serious stuff in. They don't understand that the serious stuff *is* the comedy. It can make you laugh hilariously, but the good comedy is serious, it is deeply disturbing. Great comedy writers are serious writers. Shaw is a terrifically good example of that; he's at his best when he's being funny. Same with Oscar Wilde. THE IMPORTANCE OF BEING EARNEST is a wonderful, great play, and seems to be very not serious, but if you look closely at it, it's quite serious about lying, and about the secret lives that people live, and how they try to hide it. And it's all done through comedy.

MH: Why is it you admire the plays of the Jacobean above all others?

PB: Their language, and power, and the size of it all is impressive... and the poetic power of the language is so

PB: Where it comes from, really, is the Jacobean. Their marvelous sense of size and weight, and just the pictures. The difference about writing plays is not dialogue — it comes out in reams once you get started. And even creating characters isn't so difficult. It's no good having two people stand on stage talking; even if the talk is wonderful, that's not the answer. That's either television, or a novel, or radio really, where just talk carries you through. You need something else, something that dramatizes what they're talking about even as they're talking. And that's not easy to do. For me, each scene has to be a dramatic scene, and dialogue doesn't necessarily carry it forward. You have to think of the visual all the time. That's where my interest in the cinema feeds into the theater, in the sense that it's a visual medium.

MH: Since you recently married an American and do a lot of Hollywood film work, I imagine you come to the states rather often.

PB: I love going to America, to New York particularly. Though I am sometimes terribly sad because Americans don't live up to their origins, to their charter as it were. And sometimes you feel they've lost what makes them so unique, which is the optimism, and the hope, which is wonderful. I have to say that, with the religious right, you feel that there is a darker and more menacing side to American, which fortunately I don't come into contact with very much. So I tend to see the best of Americans, and when I go it's always invigorating.

MH: Do you think that optimism is a requirement for a satirist?

PB: Funnily enough, usually they say that satirists are pessimists, but they're not; they're usually disappointed optimists. The disappointment rarely lasts, though, and then you write another play, and you think that's going to cure it. You have to be an optimist if you feel, as I do, that writing a play is going to change anything. You wouldn't be a satirist if you weren't an optimist, because if you were a pessimist you'd think nothing you ever wrote would ever make any difference. I mean, it's ridiculous really. It's a contradiction in terms, but there you are. That's what art is about — being a contradiction in terms.

Allen P. Radway NOBLESSE OBLIGE

Although our Senate and House of Representatives echo Britain's Houses of Lords and Commons, America's bicameral Congress enjoys an equivalence of power now foreign to Parliament's twin chambers. The British aristocracy, represented by the Lords through inherited estates and titles, has for more than a century seen its bonafide political power stripped away by democratic reforms. In *THE RULING CLASS*, playwright Peter Barnes finds ample fodder for satire in the paradox of a ruling class that no longer rules; whose former clout has been reduced to political pomp of little circumstance.

The development of the modern British ruling class

wonderful... and the monsters that were created on the stage... It's so rich and vivid that it's been a permanent influence.

MH: The qualities you mention are certainly apparent in *THE RULING CLASS*.

has its roots in 18th Century nobility such as the great Tudor and Stuart lines. The failure of many of these old families of Britain, Wales, and Scotland to produce male heirs meant estates passed on to heiresses, who married into urbane families often living far from the old rural estates. Many smaller estates thus began to amalgamate, causing a consolidation of land between the 1760s and the 1820s under the ownership of more cultivated and nationalistic families. As fewer landowners possessed increasingly larger estates, a landed aristocracy replaced the local country nobility.

The wealth accompanying land ownership provided a foundation for a new patrician hierarchy. Along with the vast territories came their respective political constituencies. Fewer landowners meant that a single-family dynasty had much greater representation in Parliament. The aristocracy further flourished during the American Revolution and the French Wars, as natural resources were in great demand, and conveniently located in their own backyards.

By the 19th Century, the elected House of Commons was almost completely comprised of the landed elite, who already governed the House of Lords. While the older men of the families tended to the political business, their sons sought to further the family by pursuing prestigious careers in law, church and military. Landowners further secured their fortunes by reaping the financial fruits of the Industrial Revolution and rising technology.

The 1880s, however, brought drastic changes and marked the beginning of the end for the ruling class. The words "democracy" and "middle class" entered common vocabulary in Europe and threatened every aspect of the aristocracy; French, German and British governments alike began to incorporate the working class parties, and for the first time, patrician rule was questioned. The effect weighed heavily on British landowners. Reform bills calling for the redistribution of constituencies from landowners back to the countryside barred the aristocracy from the House of Commons. When the House of Lords' resistance to the Commons' legislation became a persistent hindrance to reform, the Lords' power to veto was removed altogether.

In the 20th Century, two world wars gave the British ruling class an opportunity to redeem itself as a body of natural leaders. But World War I only succeeded in decimating its ranks and wealth, and World War II — despite Winston Churchill's indisputably blue blood — could not restore the elite to their former status. Severe debt, accumulating since the turn of the century, forced many aristocrats to sell, liquidate, or reduce their estates. And so *THE RULING CLASS* begins with an ironic toast to "the memory of England," that "teeming womb of privilege," whose aristocratic glory days have themselves been reduced to a thing of nostalgia.

—Source: *The Decline and Fall of the British Aristocracy* by David Cannadine..

Join us next week, Tuesday November 18, for Andrei Tarkovsky's last film:

Offret/The Sacrifice

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