Film Studies

A Level

Film Studies

F631 Section A:
English Language Film

Study Guide 1: Skyfall

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OCR
Oxford Cambridge and RSA

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After viewing – weighing it all up

F631 SECTION A: ENGLISH LANGUAGE FILM
STUDY GUIDE 1: SKYFALL

FILM FACTS

Directed by: Sam Mendes

Certificate: 12

Running time: 143 minutes

Release date: 26th October 2012

SYNOPSIS

The film opens with Bond on a mission which goes badly wrong, resulting in Bond's status as an agent in question. When MI6 is directly attacked, Bond seeks to lend his assistance to the cause. This brings him into conflict with the film's arch-villain, Silva. The film culminates in a battle in which Bond must confront demons from the past and present..

BEFORE VIEWING – ISSUES AND RESEARCH POINTS

There are many elements of this film which can be used as platforms for study for this unit. It is vitally important to have some preparatory knowledge and understanding of the seven frameworks for analysis as mapped out in the specification. Completion of the tasks below will give you the platform to develop your viewing of this film in relation to these frameworks.

GENRE

The links below will help you develop a precise understanding of this key concept in film and media studies plus enable you to develop a detailed understanding of the conventions of action-adventure films and spy films and of Bond films as a sub genre which sits inside these generic categories

http://www.mediaknowall.com/as_alevel/alevkeyconcepts/alevelkeycon.php?pageID=genre

http://www.filmsite.org/genres.html

http://www.filmsite.org/actionfilms.html

NARRATIVE

Like genre, this is one of the fundamental concepts upon which the study of film is based. Reading through the materials linked to below will give you a very detailed insight into the key theoretical perspectives on analysing narrative.

http://shaunladd.wordpress.com/theory/narrative-theory/

http://www.thewritersjourney.com/hero's_journey.htm

MESSAGES AND VALUES

Films are acts of mass communication - they all have many things to say, and they will exhibit some type of value system - highlighting the importance of certain types of behaviours: what are acceptable and not acceptable behaviours in different contexts. We as individuals give out our own signals which express elements of our personalities.

If you are studying film in a school setting, you probably have to wear a uniform of follow a dress code. How closely do you keep to the rules? Your answer to that question should tell you something about whether you share the same values regarding appearance as your school. How closely or not you keep to the uniform / dress code policy will communicate something about your personality to yourself and to others around you.

If you are studying film in a college setting, you may well not have a set dress code. However, consider to what extent you dress in similar ways to the other members of your film class? This will say something with regard to your own message about who and what you are.

REPRESENTATION

The film offers fertile ground for analysing aspects of representation. Daniel Chandler (and others) have identified the 'C. A.G.E.' of identity (social **c**lass, **a**ge, **g**ender and **e**thnicity). These areas of representation offer multiple points of analysis with the film.

Prior to viewing the films with the approach of analysing aspects of representation undertake the following activities;

SOCIAL CLASS – WHAT IS IT?

Working class / middle class / upper class

To begin becoming familiar with key terms in the study of social class, go to the following link:

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=K2k1iRD2f-c&feature=kp

This clip, while old now, encapsulates the core of ideas about social class in Britain. To further develop and refine your knowledge, research into the JICNARS scale. If you're feeling brave and / or you're studying Sociology, then look into what the terms *bourgeoisie* and *proletariat* mean

GENDER

To develop an understanding of gender representation and the concept of stereotyping, go to

http://www.mediaknowall.com/as_alevel/alevkeyconcepts/alevelkeycon.php?pageID=gender

http://www.cliffsnotes.com/sciences/sociology/sex-and-gender/gender-stereotypes

Read through the articles and then search for clips / trailers for Bond films such as 'Goldfinger' Guy Hamilton, 1964), Live and Let Die, A View to a kill (1984 and Golden Eye (Martin Campbell, 1995).

What evidence of stereotypical representations of gender can you find in such clips? This will be useful for later considering how similar or different 'Skyfall' is in its representation of gender to previous Bond films?

ETHNICITY / NATIONAL IDENTITY

The Bond film franchise, over the 50 plus years of its history, has now become entwined with notions of Britishness, and alongside that approaches to ethnicity. As with any Bond film, this one offers much scope for exploring and analysing representations of ethnicity, national identity and how those concepts entangle themselves with debates about Britishness. To begin exploring such issues, go to the following link, download the presentation file embedded and answer the questions under 'What Is Britishness?'

http://www.rgs.org/OurWork/Schools/Teaching+resources/Key+Stage+3+resources/Who+do+we+think+we+are/What+is+Britishness.htm

Next, use a dictionary to explore definitions of the term 'ethnicity'. Establish what you consider to be your ethnic identity or ethnic identities (it's possible to feel different ethnic identities). Consider how frequently you see this identity (or identities) represented in various aspects of British media and consider how such representations occur – can you identify stereotypes? Are the representations more positive than negative, or vice versa? You will need to be focussed and precise with this task to avoid slipping into generalities.

AUTHORSHIP

The question as to whether films have an author has long dogged the subject. You can begin to explore this debate by going to the following:

http://www.cs.grinnell.edu/~simpsone/Connections/Film/Author/index.html

http://alisashortfilm.wordpress.com/2011/05/06/francois-truffaut-auteur-theory/

http://alisashortfilm.wordpress.com/tag/auteur-film-2/

http://cinema-fanatic.com/2010/07/27/auteur-of-the-week-sam-mendes/

Given what you have read from the above links, before viewing, consider to what extent Skyfall's director Sam Mendes can be considered to be the author of the film.

THEME

'Theme' is one of those odd words with which most people are familiar, yet knowing precisely what the word means, is a trickier prospect than it first looks. To be able to detect what theme or themes are worked across in a film, it's important to develop an understanding of the meaning of the word, plus some familiarity with core themes in films to be able to see how such ideas do or do not apply to Skyfall.

http://www.cod.edu/people/faculty/pruter/film/literary.htm

http://thescriptlab.com/screenwriting/story/development/1005-top-10-central-themes-in-film

STYLE

Like theme, style is another one of those amorphous words which it can be hard to concretely define. Reading the article at the link below should enable you to develop your understanding of this area.

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Film_styles

WHILE WATCHING

To develop your ability to write about Skyfall in relation to each framework of analysis you (and a group of fellow students) should make notes on the following prompts:

GENRE

1. What 'action film' codes and conventions are present? What textual evidence can you find to support your view?

2. What 'spy film' codes and conventions are present? What textual evidence can you find to support your view?

3. How closely or not does Skyfall stick to the patterns established by previous Bond films?

NARRATIVE

1. How readily can Propp's ideas be applied to the characters and narrative of Skyfall?

2. How readily can Vogler's concept of the hero's journey be applied to the narrative of Skyfall?

3. What sets of binary oppositions can you identify in the film? How do these help to drive the narrative forwards?

MESSAGES AND VALUES

1. What message does the film seek to communicate about the role of the security / intelligence services in protecting Britain's interests?

2. What message does the film seek to communicate about where threats to Britain and British interests may lay?

3. In the film, how much are individuals like Bond, M and Mallory valued by their colleagues and by Britain?

REPRESENTATION

Focussing mostly on the characters of Bond, M, Mallory, Eve Moneypenny, Silva and Severine, make notes to answer the following:

1. Social class – what social classes are represented? How are they represented? What textual evidence can you find to support your view?

2. Age - what age groups are represented? How are they represented? What textual evidence can you find to support your view?

3. Gender - How are the two genders represented? What textual evidence can you find to support your view?

4. National identity / ethnicity -what nationalities and ethnic identities are represented? How are they represented? What textual evidence can you find to support your view?

AUTHORSHIP

1. What evidence can be found of a Sam Mendes auteur signature here?

2. Is it possible to locate other 'authors' in the film in the shape of the character James Bond himself?

THEME

1. What theme or themes are evident in the film? What textual evidence can you find to support your view?

2. Can you detect any sense of allegory in the film?

STYLE

1. To what extent does the film follow the patterns of the 'Classical Hollywood narrative'?

2. How are visual and aural aspects of film style being used to support responses to any and all of the above questions?

AFTER VIEWING – WEIGHING IT ALL UP

GENRE

1. How important to the film's commercial and critical success is the adherence to generic codes and conventions?

2. To what extent is this a typical Bond film?

NARRATIVE

1. How similar / different is Bond to other action film characters that you are familiar with? Why do you think this is the case?

2. How similar / different is Silva to other action film / Bond film villain characters that you are familiar with? Why do you think this is the case?

3. To what extent does the film offer a conventional film narrative to its audience?

MESSAGES AND VALUES

1. What are the key messages and values of the film? How are these communicated using aspects of film language?

2. What do you consider the preferred reading to be of the value of the security / intelligence services?

REPRESENTATION

Focussing on the characters of M, Eve Moneypenny and Severine, consider how the film represents females.

Focussing on the characters of Bond, Mallory and Silva, consider how the film represents males.

1. Is Britishness represented positively or negatively? Consider what is learnt about Silva and his background and how the other major characters represent British people.

2. To what extent is it true that Skyfall reinforces the social status of the British middle class?

AUTHORSHIP

1. Who / what is the author of Skyfall? – Eon Productions / Sam Mendes / Daniel Craig / Ian Fleming / Bond film conventions / audience expectations of a Bond film?

THEME

1. To what extent do you think the film justifies the responses taken by British governments (and others too) to the perceived threats of the post 9/11 world? (The film makes much of the value of the intelligence services in this war in the shadows).

2. Focussing particularly on the characters of Bond, M and Mallory, to what extent is it true that getting older means getting weaker (both physically and mentally)?

STYLE

1. To what extent is this film stylistically similar to / different from the other two Bond films starring Daniel Craig?

2. Why do you think the film does / does not follow the patterns of the 'Classical Hollywood narrative'?

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