



Film Studies

A Level

Film Studies

F631 Section A: English
language film

Study Guide 2: Tinker Tailor
Soldier Spy

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F631 SECTION A: ENGLISH LANGUAGE FILM

STUDY GUIDE 2: TINKER TAILOR SOLDIER SPY

FILM FACTS

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| Directed by: | Tomas Alfredson |
| Certificate: | 15 |
| Running time: | 122 minutes |
| UK Release date: | 9th January 2012 |

SYNOPSIS

The film is set in the 1970s, during the Cold War (the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe versus America and Western Europe). It is a time of great mistrust between east and west, a time of defection from one side to the other, with moles on both sides. A British intelligence operation in Hungary goes badly wrong, costing Control (the head of the intelligence service) and his right hand man, George Smiley, their jobs. A mole is suspected of having given information to the Soviets, and George Smiley is called upon to return to the intelligence service to investigate these claims.

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 knowledge and understanding 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 to develop a detailed understanding of the conventions of spy films.

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

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

Compared to other contemporary spy films – such as the Bond films, the Bourne and Mission Impossible franchises, this film is quite different. It would also be worth investigating some other spy films as something to benchmark Tinker Tailor Soldier Spy against. Click the links below to view clips from some other iconic spy films

The Ipress File

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=E1pa9yTI3ZY&safe=active>

Funeral In Berlin

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1AHOUwBdsKs&safe=active>

The Fourth Protocol

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=d01NRFVEA-o&safe=active>

Day of the Jackal

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_PUlyUbXZoE&safe=active

Plus, there's also comedy spoofs such as the Johnny English films to look at:

Johnny English

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JSg2tgnvtgY&safe=active>

Johnny English Reborn

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LOSZLGzgnBs&safe=active>

NARRATIVE

Like genre, this is one of the fundamental concepts upon which the study of film is based. Reading through the materials to be found at the two links 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 is acceptable and not acceptable behaviour 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 or 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.' (social class, age, gender and ethnicity) of identity. 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 think back to what you saw in the spy film clips from the previous exercise.

What evidence of stereotypical representations of gender can you find in such clips? This will be useful for later considering how similar or different 'Tinker Tailor Soldier Spy' is in its representation of gender to other spy films?

Ethnicity / National identity

Tinker Tailor Soldier Spy features a wealth of British acting talent, with much of the film produced in Britain, and is adapted from the novel of the same name by the British author John le Carré. The main character, George Smiley, has appeared in a number of le Carré's novels and subsequent film and TV adaptations of some of these novels. Thus, in many ways, this is a very British film. While set in the past, it is a film produced in the contemporary era and as such is responded to by contemporary audiences and will therefore interact with present days sense of ethnicity and national identity. Therefore, the film can be analysed with regard to how it does represent such issues. 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 / 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/~simpson/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://www.theguardian.com/film/2011/sep/10/tinker-tailor-soldier-spy>

Given what you have read from the above links, before viewing, consider to what extent Tinker Tailor Soldier Spy's director Tomas Alfredson 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 Tinker Tailor Soldier Spy.

<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 of those amorphous words which it can be hard to concretely define. Reading the article at the link below should enable you to further develop your understanding of this area.

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

WHILE WATCHING

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

GENRE

1. What spy film codes and conventions are present? What textual evidence can you find to support your view?
2. How closely or not does Tinker Tailor Soldier Spy stick to the patterns established by other spy films?

NARRATIVE

1. How readily can Propp's ideas be applied to the characters and narrative of Tinker Tailor Soldier Spy?
2. How readily can Vogler's concept of the hero's journey be applied to the narrative of Tinker Tailor Soldier Spy?
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 might lie?
3. How much are individuals like Smiley and Control valued by their colleagues and by Britain?

REPRESENTATION

Focussing mostly on the characters of Smiley, Control, Peter Guillam, Bill Haydon, 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 Tomas Alfredson auteur signature here?
2. Is it possible to locate other 'authors' in the film in the shape of the character George Smiley 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 spy film?

NARRATIVE

1. How similar / different is Smiley to other spy film 'hero' characters that you are familiar with? Why do you think this is the case?
2. How similar / different is Bill Haydon to other spy 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

1. Focussing on the characters of Ann Smiley, Mary Alleline and Connie Sachs, consider how the film represents females.
2. Focussing on the characters of Smiley, Control, Peter Guillam and Bill Haydon consider how the film represents males.
3. Is Britishness represented positively or negatively? Consider what is learnt about the activities of MI6 both in Britain and outside of Britain in the film.
4. To what extent is it true that Tinker Tailor Soldier Spy reinforces the social status of the British middle class?

AUTHORSHIP

1. Who / what is the author of Skyfall? – Tomas Alfredson / Gary Oldman / John le Carré / spy film conventions / audience expectations of a spy film?

THEME

1. Arguably, the film is very concerned with trust which presents the audience with a range of characters, none of whom can trust each other. What picture of working life in the intelligence service emerges from this?
2. Focussing particularly on the characters of Smiley and Control, to what extent is it true that getting older means getting weaker (both physically and mentally)?
3. What are the similarities and differences to Skyfall with the depictions of trust and age?

STYLE

1. To what extent is this film stylistically similar to / different from to other spy-oriented films, such as The Mission Impossible films, and films from the Bond and Bourne franchises?
2. Why do you think the film does / does not follow the patterns of the 'Classical Hollywood narrative'?

To give us feedback on, or ideas about the OCR resources you have used, email resourcesfeedback@ocr.org.uk

OCR Resources: *the small print*

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