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Film & History: An Interdisciplinary Journal of Film and Television Studies,
Volume 34.1 (2004), pp. 12-15 (Article)

Published by Center for the Study of Film and History

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1353/flm.2004.0024>



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Jim Welsh: In Appreciation of a Pioneer

By John E. O'Connor

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“We do not believe film should be used merely to illustrate classics of literature.” This was James M. Welsh setting the tone for a day-long 1977 Rockefeller Foundation invitational conference entitled *Film and the Humanities*. “A humanities course that takes as its substance the cinema of Ingmar Bergman,” he continued, “to take one unassailable example, makes as much sense as one concentrating on the plays of Shakespeare or Eugene O’Neill.” As historians committed to the study of film and television in the context of our own discipline, we of *Film & History* could not have agreed more. At that point, in the mid 1970s, both *Film & History* and *Literature/Film Quarterly*, the journal Welsh had co-founded several years before, were just beginning to help shape their emerging fields of study. Our efforts were within the context of the American Historical Association, often through the Historians Film Committee. Welsh and his journal worked within the Modern Language Association (MLA) and brought many *littérateurs* to the cause of visual literacy. The current issues of the journals are now in their thirty-fourth year of publication with libraries world-wide subscribing and sending manuscripts for consideration by these peer-reviewed publications. Now, as he approaches retirement from his long and productive teaching career, we need to recognize Jim Welsh’s considerable contributions to the work we all seek to do well in the classroom, in the archives, and in the broader public realm urging all viewers to appreciate film and television as more than an evening’s entertainment.

In the early 1970s, straight from graduate training at the University of Kansas, Welsh joined the English Department at Maryland’s Salisbury State College (now Salisbury University),



Jim Welsh at the University of Bath Lit/Film Conference with Brian McFarlane, author of *Words and Image: Australian Novels into Film* (Heinemann, 1983) and *An Autobiography of British Cinema* (Methuen, 1997).

Courtesy of John Tibbetts.



John Tibbetts (left), film archivist and historian Kevin Brownlow, Jim Welsh, and Frank Thompson, author of *The Alamo* movie tie-in book, at the Buster Keaton Festival, Iola, Kansas.

Courtesy of John Tibbetts.

what was then referred to as “the little college on the shore.” There he found a colleague, Tom Erskine, who had also spent some time at Kansas. With a start-up grant from the university they were able to establish the journal which filled for literature studies the same function *Film & History* was trying to supply for its discipline. It became a support network for literature professors integrating film into their scholarship and teaching and also provided an outlet for their work, which was largely spurned by existing journals.

Along the way, he shared many projects with John Tibbetts. John C. Tibbetts, who later edited *American Classic Screen* for the National Film Society and coordinated film workshops and conferences with Jim Welsh, met Welsh in 1968 at the University of Kansas, where they both became involved in the KU Film Society, a series that brought to campus

filmmakers ranging from Jonas Mekas to King Vidor to Jean-Luc Godard. (Steve Allen, Kevin Brownlow, and Tony Palmer would follow later.) Tibbetts and Welsh first collaborated on *His Majesty the American: The Cinema of Douglas Fairbanks, Sr.* (A.S.

Barnes, 1977) before going on later to collaborate on *The Cinema of Tony Richardson: Essays and Interviews* (SUNY Press, 1999) and several other projects for Facts On File Publishers, starting with *The Encyclopedia of Novels into Film* (first published in 1998, with an expanded and revised version scheduled for publication in 2004). Tibbetts, a skilled illustrator as well as an editor and teacher, provided many covers for *LFQ* over the years, as well as interviews and essays, such as “Opera on Film,” the lead piece for the first issue of *LFQ* in 2004. John Tibbetts

has been a wonderful working partner to Welsh over the years while maintaining his own publishing interests in the area of film music; he is a popular teacher at Kansas State University and a trusted correspondent for a number of film groups around the world.

Mrs. Anne Welsh deserves much credit for the success of most ventures listed in this encomium. With her experience in publication, Anne has been invaluable to the continued production of *LFQ* over the past 20 years. In addition to overseeing the state bidding process and being responsible for subscription renewals as Business Manager, she also took care of layout and design (working closely with the editor) and even handled the many general mailings. She was particularly responsible for the success of a conference on the Vietnam war held on the Salisbury State University campus—and in connection with the myriad of details of other conferences and NEH programs conducted under the rubric of *LFQ* and Salisbury University. When she retired from the Salisbury University Publications Office in 2003, it was as if a keystone had been removed from the arch supporting *LFQ* and the Publications Office, even though she continues to work for *LFQ*. Thirty years on, the editors and the readers of *LFQ* boast a catalog of published pieces comparable to those major journals, a loyal cohort of accomplished contributors, and readers from numerous foreign countries as well as across the United States. Consider the list of film directors who have allowed themselves to be interviewed especially for this little journal: Franco Zeffirelli, Andrej Wajda, Federico Fellini, Robert Altman, William Friedkin, Billy Wilder, Frank Capra, John Schlesinger, Marcel Ophuls, Peter Watkins, Karel Reisz, Kevin Brownlow, Terrence Davies, Louis Malle, Sidney Lumet, and more. Welsh wrote recently with humor about the journal's early efforts to build productive links with some members of the pseudo-elite cinema studies world, "before the takeover by the long knives of the Francophile zombie theorists." On the other side, he also recognized that there were so-called "prestigious schools" at which one could "publish and perish" nonetheless, because writing about film (however thoughtful) was judged not to be worthwhile. Fortunately for our authors and their students, those days are behind us.

Meanwhile, in addition to providing the forum for so many other scholars, Welsh has enjoyed a productive scholarly career of his own. His extensive list of published books includes: *The Encyclopedia of Orson Welles*, with T.L. Erskine and Chuck Berg (2003); *The Encyclopedia of Stanley Kubrick*, with Gene Phillips

and Rodney Hill (2002); *Shakespeare Into Film*, with Richard Vela (2002); *The Encyclopedia of Filmmakers (Two Volumes)*, with J.C. Tibbetts (2002); *The Encyclopedia of Stage Plays Into Film*, with J.C. Tibbetts (2001); *Video Versions: Film Adaptations of Films on Video*, with T.L. Erskine (2000); *The Cinema of Tony Richardson: Essays and Interviews*, with J.C. Tibbetts (1999); *Novels into Film*, with J.C. Tibbetts (1999); *The Encyclopedia of Novels Into Film*, with J.C. Tibbetts (1999); *Peter Watkins: A Guide to References and Resources* (1986); *Abel Gance*, with S.P. Kramer (1978); and *Ben Jonson: A Quadricentennial Bibliography*, with D.H. Brock (1974). He also has well over 300 essays and reviews published in dozens of journals, regularly contributes to *Magill's Cinema Annual*, and maintained for eighteen years a regularly appearing newspaper column on film.

Perhaps most of all, as winner of several outstanding faculty awards, Professor Welsh will be missed by his students. This author is in the enviable position of having observed Jim's teaching first-hand and over an extended time. For ten days in 1990 we combined small classes (a total of fourteen students) for travel to Great Britain. For my students the experience amounted to an extended field trip as part of a semester-long humanities course, a course that was particularly valuable because of what Welsh brought to it, introducing them to the London theater scene, lecturing on medieval Britain in the shadow of Stonehenge, helping them to appreciate the beauty of Salisbury Cathedral, and more.

We at *Film & History* are most sincere in wishing Jim Welsh and his wife Anne, for years the general manager of *LFQ*, a long, happy, and healthy retirement.



Anne Welsh

Courtesy of Jim Welsh



Jim and Anne: Two Pioneers.

Courtesy of Kathy Posey.

Jim Welsh Books Published and Forthcoming (as of May 2004):

The Encyclopedia of Hollywood (with T.L. Erskine, Scott and Barbara Siegel). Facts On File, 2004-2005 (forthcoming).

Welsh and Erskine have updated the original Siegel *Encyclopedia*, published by Avon in 1989. Intended for a popular rather than an academic readership, this “reference” work strives to achieve a distinctive (if sometimes goofy) readable charm, while working a 15-year update for the project.

The Encyclopedia of Orson Welles (with T.L. Erskine and C.Berg). New York: Facts On File, 2003.

This proved to be the most popular of the “Great Filmmakers Series” edited by Jim Welsh and John Tibbetts, both of whom assisted with the writing of the book and contributed entries, as well as editing the series. The book’s Foreword was provided by the actress Ruth Warrick, who played Emily Norton, the first wife of Charles Foster Kane.

Shakespeare Into Film (with Richard Vela). New York: Checkmark, 2000.

The first half of this book consists of the A-to-Z Shakespeare entries from *The Encyclopedia of Stageplays Into Film*; the second half consists of essays selected from several Shakespeare issues of *Literature/Film Quarterly*. The book opens with an Introduction by Shakespeare-on-film authority Kenneth S. Rothwell entitled “How the 20th Century Saw the Shakespeare Film” that surveys the century. The paperback edition has been used as a textbook .

The Encyclopedia of Filmmakers (with J.Tibbetts). 2 vols. New York: Facts On File, 2002.

According to *Library Journal*, “accomplished scholars” Tibbetts and Welsh “assembled a team of 50 experts on film directors,” producing an “excellent work [that] will prove useful to anyone interested in film studies and film history.” The “thoughtful and scholarly” individual entries were judged “well written and researched,” and “written with clarity and enthusiasm.” The British film director, archivist and television producer Kevin Brownlow wrote the Foreword for this book.

The Encyclopedia of Stanley Kubrick (with Rodney Hill, et al.). New York: Facts On File, 2002.

“This excellent work will prove useful to anyone interested in film studies and film history,” wrote Ronald H. Fritze for *Library Journal*. *Choice* reviewer A. Ellis also praised this “impressive yet concise collection.” The book was a collaborative effort involving both Jim Welsh and John Tibbetts, along with Rodney Hill and Gene D. Phillips. The Foreword was written by Kubrick insider Anthony Frewin, the author of 12 books, both fiction and nonfiction, and Stanley Kubrick’s personal assistant for nearly 25 years. An Afterword was written by British actor Leon Vitali, who played Lord Bullingdon in Stanley Kubrick’s magnificent adaptation of William Makepeace Thackeray’s *Barry Lyndon* (1975) Vitali then stayed on to work at the Kubrick estate, assisting the director in all phases of production, and, after the director’s death, supervising the film to video transfers for the Kubrick Collection..

The Encyclopedia of Stageplays into Film (with John C. Tibbetts). New York: Facts On File, 2001.

The Foreword for this companion volume to *The Encyclopedia of Novels Into Film* was written by the playwright, comedian, and television personality Steve Allen the week before his death. The book is divided into three parts, covering “serious” plays, Shakespeare, and musical theatre adapted to film.

Video Versions: Film Adaptations of Plays on Video (with T.L. Erskine). Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2000.

A basic reference work for plays available on video.

The Cinema of Tony Richardson: Essays and Interviews (with John C. Tibbetts).Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 1999.

One of only two books treating the career of a film and theatre director who revolutionized British Theatre during the 1950s by bringing so-called “kitchen-sink” realism to the Royal Court Theatre with his groundbreaking production of John Osborn’s *Look Back in Anger*, which Richardson went on to film with Richard Burton in the lead as Jimmy Porter. The book includes interview material with talents who worked with Richardson, such as director Karel Reisz, editor Kevin Brownlow, and cinematographer David Watkin. The Foreword was written by Jocelyn Herbert, who not only worked with Richardson on stage and screen projects but was also maiden of honour when Richardson married the actress Vanessa Redgrave. The book’s chapters “amply rebut the director’s detractors and lay a strong claim for him as a major British auteur,” according to *Choice* reviewer Maurice Yacowar of the University of Calgary.

Novels into Film (with John Tibbetts), Rev. Edn. New York: Checkmark, 1999.

Extended and revised paperback edition of *The Encyclopedia of Novels Into Film*. A new Foreword has been added, written by Hollywood director Robert Wise, who edited both *Citizen Kane* and *The Magnificent Ambersons* for Orson Welles before going on to direct such classics as *The Day the Earth Stood Still*, *The Sound of Music*, *West Side Story*, and *Star Trek: The Motion Picture*.

The Encyclopedia of Novels Into Film (with John C. Tibbetts). New York: Facts On File, 1998.

Exemplary, illustrated, A-to-Z encyclopedic treatment, favorably reviewed by *Entertainment Weekly* by Megan Harlan (9 Jan. 1998): "Discriminating and jargon free, this compendium should prove useful to film and book buffs—and ought to be required reading for literature-trawling filmmakers." *Choice* reviewer W.P. Hogan also praised this "outstanding selective survey of a fascinating topic." This "splendid book," he added, "should be purchased by most libraries, but despite its title, it belongs in the circulating, not the reference collection." A newly revised and expanded hardcover edition is scheduled for late 2004 or early 2005.

Peter Watkins: A Guide to References and Resources. Boston: G. K. Hall, 1986.

This *Reference Guide* represents 10 years of research on the work of the highly temperamental and controversial Academy Award-winning British director of *The War Game*, a benchmark for the anti-nuclear CND movement in Britain and a rallying point for anti-war protesters worldwide during the 1960s. "*The War Game*," wrote the editor of *Film Quarterly*, Ernest Callenbach, in 1987, "is the most politically controversial film ever made in England and with it Watkins entered a career of making films that troubled establishments everywhere. Good biographical and critical sketches," Callenbach added about the book. "Included are more than 700 numbered citations to magazine articles, newspaper accounts, and books from 1960 to 1985. In addition Welsh provides a biographical sketch, complete descriptions of Watkins's films and videoplays, a bibliography of writings by Watkins, a list of archival sources that own his films, and a list of distributors of his films. Thorough author and film titles indices round out this work," wrote the *Choice* reviewer (January 1987).

Abel Gance. (with Steven Philip Kramer). Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1978.

This is the first survey of the career of this pioneering French director written in English. The book concludes with an interview with Gance conducted in his Paris apartment in July of 1973 entitled "Film As Incantation." According to the *Choice* reviewer, "this book rescued from unmerited oblivion a great film pioneer. Interviewing Gance himself, consulting his personal archives, studying closely his films that have survived, the authors successfully root Gance's approach to film in the intellectual history of his time." The "descriptions and analyses of Gance's most important films were judged to be "excellent."

His Majesty the American: The Cinema of Douglas Fairbanks, Sr. (with John C. Tibbetts). South Brunswick, NJ: A. S. Barnes, 1977.

Illustrated survey of the life and career of the popular matinee idol who began as a stage comedian and then remade his image as a swashbuckling hero of the silent cinema. The book traces many of his relatively obscure early films to private collectors, who owned the surviving prints and includes a comprehensive filmography. "The text is written with an appropriate blend of factual information, quotation, and interpretation," George Rehrauer wrote in *Cinema Booklist*. "Analysis is provided in depth and the similarity of Fairbanks's screen character and his personal self-image is often noted. There is a consistent quality in all the elements of this volume that will appeal to all types of readers. Recommended for all collections."

Ben Jonson: A Quadricentennial Bibliography, 1947-1972 (with D. Heyward Brock). Scarecrow Author Bibliographies, No. 16. Metuchen, NJ: The Scarecrow Press, 1974.

Heyward Brock did the lion's share of the work for this "useful" reference work surveying the work of the Renaissance playwright and contemporary of Shakespeare who served as England's Poet Laureate. Not to be confused with the American actor, Ben Johnson, who appeared in Westerns. No, this one is for "serious" Renaissance scholars.