Cinema '62: The Greatest Year at the Movies by Stephen Farber and Michael McClellan (review)

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Stephen Farber & Michael McClellan, *Cinema '62: The Greatest Year at the Movies*, New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2020, 252 pages, ISBN 978-1-9788-0882-9

The subtitle of *Cinema '62*, by Stephen Farber and Michael McClellan, trumpets that 1962 was "The Greatest Year at the Movies." The authors began extolling that year's cinematic attributes in 2002, when Farber wrote a *New York Times* article that coincided with McClellan's retrospective of 1962 films at Landmark Cinemas in Los Angeles. The "greatest" claim challenges the often-cited "greatest" year of 1939, which serves as a motif throughout the book, often as a comparative point to illustrate change. The studio system that defined 1939 cinema was in collapse by 1962. The Production Code that dominated content in 1939 was repeatedly breached in the latter year. Foreign films, which received little U.S. release in 1939, got wide play in 1962 when art houses flourished. Black and white film, the primary format in 1939, had its final year of dominance in 1962, the last time there were more monochrome movies than color.

In addition to this comparison of "best" years, *Cinema '62* is a fascinating look into the way filmmaking from that year intersected with social and political strains, both within and outside of the film industry. They summarize, "The American movies produced and released in 1962 reflect the youthful, optimistic spirit of the Kennedy administration" [209]. They also discuss the films in terms of current events, including advances in civil rights and John Glenn's orbiting of the earth during the U.S. space race with the Soviet Union.

The book is not organized by chronology or genre, but rather by innovations. Chapters focus on "New American Auteurs" (including Stanley Kubrick and Sam Peckinpah), turnover from Classic Hollywood to new filmmakers and actors (prior to the "New Hollywood" that began at the end of the 1960s), the proliferations of psychological themes and screen adaptations, the shift to color films, the focus on formerly taboo subjects, and the effect of the Kennedy era's "New Frontier" on the film world.

The "New Frontier" chapter includes an extended discussion of *To Kill a Mockingbird*, placing it firmly within the Civil Rights Era, a year when Martin Luther King, Jr., was arrested for protesting segregation, President Kennedy sent the National Guard to ensure that black student James Meredith could attend the University of Mississippi, and movie theatres in the South were desegregated. The Cold War era was the focus of the year's most biting satire, John Frankenheimer's *The Manchurian Candidate,* with McCarthyism and assassination among its elements. The authors note that the film was pulled from distribution for more than two decades after the Kennedy assassination.

Significantly, the book first explores foreign films released in the U.S. that year, some of which were made in 1960 & '61. They call 1962 the "year of the art house," when cities throughout the U.S. featured first-run showings of classics including Bergman's *Through a Glass Darkly*, Polanski's debut, *Knife in the Water*, Kurosawa's *Yojimbo*, Renais' *Last Year at Marienbad*, and two Antonioni classics, *La Notte* and *L'Eclisse*. Pietro Germi's comedy *Divorce, Italian Style*, won the screenplay Oscar and its star, Marcello Mastroianni, was the first Best Actor nominee for a foreign-language performance; earlier in 1962, Sophia Loren won the Best Actress Oscar for her role in the Italian film *Two Women* (1961). The frank sexuality of these films, which were not constrained by the Production Code, accounts for part of their success in the U.S.

The authors assert that not only did foreign cinema find success in the U.S., but it affected American filmmaking. This was particularly true of the French New Wave, represented not only in French films, including Truffaut's *Jules and Jim* and *Shoot the Piano Player* (made two

years earlier, but released in the U.S. in 1962) and Agnes Varda's breakthrough *Chloe from 5 to 7*, but also British films such as Tony Richardson's *A Taste of Honey* and *The Loneliness of the Long Distance Runner* and American films, including the one the authors cite as the year's masterpiece, David Lean's *Lawrence of Arabia*. In the book's concluding chapter, which is devoted to *Lawrence*, the authors quote editor Anne V. Coates (in her final interview) claiming that she convinced Lean to incorporate the "direct cutting that had been popularized in the French New Wave films while he was filming *Lawrence*" [194]. This includes the famous jump cut from Lawrence blowing out the match to the desert sunrise.

The authors call *Lawrence of Arabia* "the quintessential film of 1962" because "it brought together so many qualities that defined this extraordinary year" [189]. One of those qualities was Freudian psychology. They write that *Lawrence* focuses on "the neurotic tendencies of its flamboyant, masochistic hero" [107]. Freud's theories were still revered at the time and several films focused on psychology, including John Huston's *Freud*, starring Montgomery Clift in the title role. The most celebrated of the psychological films was Frank Perry's *David and Lisa*, with its story of two young emotionally disabled people and its potent climax when David, who refuses to be touched, asks a distraught Lisa to "take my hand." Other filmmakers, including John Frankenheimer and Arthur Penn, had "spent time on the analyst's couch," which may account for the strong psychological elements in *The Manchurian Candidate* and *The Miracle Worker*. The book's "Calling Dr. Freud" chapter also devotes a significant section to the psychology of the dysfunctional family in Sidney Lumet's screen version of O'Neill's *Long Day's Journey Into Night*.

Long Day's Journey Into Night was also one of many adaptations in that cinematic year. The authors cite a 1962 *Hollywood Reporter* article claiming that a whopping 85% of current films were based on existing sources. Best-selling novels were the source material for two blockbusters: Daryl F. Zanuck's all-star, multi-lingual production of Cornelius Ryan's *The Longest Day*, and *Mutiny on the Bounty*, MGM's massive color adaptation which became the most expensive movie ever made (soon replaced by *Cleopatra*), much of the cost covering delays caused by its star, Marlon Brando.

The year's major musicals were Broadway adaptations: Warner Brothers' *The Music Man* and *Gypsy* and MGM's *Billy Rose's Jumbo*, featuring 1962's top box office star, Doris Day. Studio interest in Broadway musicals was renewed with the massive box office for 1961's *West Side Story*. The authors assess the success of *The Music Man* amid a year of edgy films: "Braced by the omnipresence of the era's Cold War, the nostalgic public flocked to see this celebration of early twentieth-century small-town Americana, with critical reception equally enthusiastic" [70].

Another adaptation – of Tennessee Williams' *Sweet Bird of Youth* – is used to illustrate changes in censorship during this year. The authors claim that Paul Newman's Chance Wayne is the first male prostitute to be the focus of a film. The Production Code had been "relaxed" in 1961 and several 1962 films featured more blatant themes of sex, including Stanley Kubrick's controversial *Lolita*, and homosexuality, including *Advise and Consent*, which featured American film's first gay bar. British films were progressive as well, including *Victim*, which portrayed sympathetic gay characters, and *A Taste of Honey*, which featured a mixed-race sexual relationship and a gay best friend for its teenaged girl protagonist.

The authors point out that *Sweet Bird of Youth* also portrays a resonant theme in 1962, the plight of an aging actress in an industry that loves youth and favors men. Male ensembles were at the heart at many of the year's big films, including *The Longest Day* and *Lawrence of*

Arabia, while ageism worked against women. Dorothy Lamour was passed over for the final Hope-Crosby film, *Road to Hong Kong*, because she was considered too old despite being more than a decade younger than Bing Crosby. Many studio-era stars and directors made some of their last great films in 1962: Bette Davis and Joan Crawford in the domestic horror film *Whatever Happened to Baby Jane*, Barbara Stanwyck as the tough madam in *Walk on the Wild Side*, Charles Laughton and Franchot Tone in *Advise and Consent*, Olivia de Havilland in *Light in the Piazza*, and John Wayne in Howard Hawks' *Hatari!* 1962 also found Wayne with fellow Golden Age star James Stewart in John Ford's *The Man Who Shot Liberty Valence* and Joel McCrea and Randolph Scott in *Ride the High Country*, two of the final westerns in that waning genre.

One western helped films battle the draw of television: *How the West Was Won* was among the year's Cinerama films. Not enough theatres were equipped with curved Cinerama screens to make the format a long-term success, but the film did help make 1962 the best attended film year since the alltime champ, 1946.

Whether or not Farber and McClellan convince the reader that 1962 was the "greatest year at the movies," their well-researched book will certainly convince them that numerous film classics emerged from a time of significant change in the country and in the film industry itself.

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