



Robin Wood
1931 – 2009

A Tribute

When Robin Wood died, in December 2009, numerous obituaries and tributes eloquently marked the extraordinary impact and influence of his work, both on the development of the study of film and on individual lives and careers. We hope that our tribute, which takes the form of a small memorial group of Robin's uncollected articles, will complement what was written in the immediate aftermath and shock of his death.

Robin was a remarkably prolific writer and, in addition to the books for which he is best known – beginning with *Hitchcock's Films* (London: Zwemmer, 1965) – he published articles in a wide range of newspapers, magazines and journals in the UK, North America and elsewhere. This is material that in many cases can now be accessed only in specialist libraries but which makes up a considerable body of rich and varied work. The articles we have selected begin in 1960 with Robin's first published piece of film criticism and end with an article from 1983 on Ingmar Bergman, one of the directors whose films were pivotal in the development of Robin's writing.

Appropriately, the story began with Hitchcock and Robin's excited response to seeing *Psycho* (1960) on its initial British release; though – emblematically – the resulting article appeared not in Britain but in France. The question with which *Hitchcock's Films* begins – 'Why should we take Hitchcock seriously?' – tells us a good deal about prevailing cultural attitudes in Britain in 1965. The question might have been sharply provoked five years before, when Robin sent his *Psycho* article to *Sight and Sound*, the journal of the British Film Institute and voice of established critical opinion, only to be told that the film was not to be taken seriously. He then sent it to *Cahiers du Cinéma* in Paris, where it was immediately accepted, translated and published as the lead article in its November 1960 issue. Robin's original typescript no longer exists but – to mark the striking beginning of a distinguished career as well as the cultural significance of that moment – we have taken the

decision to publish the piece in French, as it appeared in *Cahiers du Cinéma*, together with an English translation.

Not long after this, Robin began his long association with the journal *Movie* (the first issue of which appeared in 1962) in the challenge it mounted to received critical values and its development of approaches – particularly to the achievements of Hollywood cinema – that had far-reaching effects on English language film criticism. The second issue of *Movie* was devoted largely to the films of Otto Preminger and contained a piece by Robin on *Exodus* (1960). We include here a longer article from *Movie* 4 on *Advise and Consent* (1962), together with one of Robin's comparatively rare articles on British cinema, his commemorative analysis of the short but remarkable career of Michael Reeves, who died in 1969 at the age of 25. The discussion of Reeves' films is also an early indication of what became a recurrent interest in aspects of the horror film.

When Robin returned to Britain after his first spell of teaching in Canada – at Queen's University, Kingston, Ontario – he wrote for *The Times Educational Supplement*, an engagement that began in October 1972 and ended in June 1977, by which time he had returned to Canada and a new appointment at York University, Toronto. The forty or so short articles – which appeared somewhat irregularly in the weekly *TES* – are perhaps the least known of all Robin's occasional writings. We hope that it may be possible in future to make available more of the pieces, which cover a range of the period's newly released films and the work of directors including Robert Altman, Claude Chabrol, Pier Paolo Pasolini, Michelangelo Antonioni, Kenji Mizoguchi and Jerry Schatzberg, but we have included here just three examples, all from 1973. 'Sense of Dislocation' is an initial response to *Last Tango in Paris* (1972), set in the context of Bertolucci's other films. 'Signs and Motifs' discusses Clint Eastwood's second film as director, *High Plains Drifter* (1972), and its relationship to the traditions of the Western.

The third piece is a striking moment in the recurrent engagement with Ingmar Bergman that forms a significant strand of Robin's writing.

His early interest in Bergman culminated in the *Movie* book, *Ingmar Bergman* (London: Studio Vista, 1969), which is strongly informed by Robin's family life as a husband and father of three. Like much of his writing, it is both deeply engaged with the detail of the films and intensely personal. 'Moment of Release', from the *TES*, written on the appearance of *Cries and Whispers* (1972), is the most succinct statement of Robin's view of Bergman from this period. The final article we are including, 'Call Me Ishmael', on *Fanny and Alexander* (1983), was published eleven years later. It is just as personal as the Bergman book but was written in a changed context: Robin's marriage had now ended and he had come out as gay. In 1978, his article 'Responsibilities of a gay film critic' had appeared in *Film Comment* (January / February, 12-17) and the personal and political commitments of his new life became increasingly central to his writing. In 'Call Me Ishmael' he looks at Bergman's work in a very different light.

This tribute from the Editorial Board of *Movie: A Journal of Film Criticism* focuses on Robin Wood the film critic. For some of us, who had known Robin as friend and colleague for many years, it is also infused with memories of his great generosity, his openness to people and ideas, and his wonderful conviviality. We publish this small memorial selection from Robin's work with affection and respect.

The Articles

'Psychoanalyse de *Psycho*', *Cahiers du Cinéma*, 113, Novembre 1960, 1-6.

'Attitudes in *Advise and Consent*', *Movie*, 4, November 1962, 15-17.

'In Memoriam: Michael Reeves', *Movie*, 17, Winter 1969-70, 2 - 6.

'Sense of Dislocation', *Times Educational Supplement*, 23 March 1973.

'Signs and Motifs', *The Times Educational Supplement*, 28 September 1973.

'Moment of Release', *Times Educational Supplement*, 2 March 1973

'Call me Ishmael', *Canadian Forum*, November 1983, 41 - 42.

Acknowledgements

We are extremely grateful to Richard Lippe for generously giving us permission to select the articles for this tribute and to republish them here. We should also like to thank *The Times Educational Supplement* for encouragement and support.

References

A list of obituaries and tributes to Robin Wood can be found at:

<http://filmstudiesforfree.wordpress.com/2009/12/19/crossing-the-wild-river-r-i-p-robin-wood-1931-2009/>

An invaluable and still developing bibliography of Robin Wood's publications can be found at:

<http://dkholm.typepad.com/cinemonkey/2010/04/robin-wood-bibliography-introduction.html>

©*Movie: A Journal of Film Criticism*, 2, 2011.