CHAPTER 7

From the 'Angry' Fifties to the 'Swinging' Sixties

' "Cultural revolution" seems not a bad description' is Arthur Marwick's apt summary comment on the sea changes in British society between the 1950s and 1960s. 'The key acts of the period,' he continues, 'were not part of some political blueprint for society but resulted from pressures generated from within society.' Hence, there was the Betting and Gaming Act in 1960 – acknowledging gambling habits across the board; in 1967, the Abortion Act, National Health Service (Family Planning) Act, and the Sexual Offences Act – legalising homosexual acts in private between two consenting adults; the Theatres Act in 1968 – abolishing stage censorship; the Representation of the People Act – reducing the voting age to eighteen – and Divorce Reform Act of 1969; and, in 1970, the Matrimonial Property Act – recognising a wife's work in the home or elsewhere as an equal contribution to family life in the event of divorce, the Equal Pay Act, albeit not immediately effective, and the Chronic Sick and Disabled Persons Act, which ratified the problems of the disabled. 'Acts of Parliament must never be mistaken for the reality of social change,' he cautions, but 'in fact the reality of change was palpable in the archaeology of everyday life, in attitudes, behaviour and artefacts.' Although he takes great care not to underestimate the undoubted 'sources of tension and deprivation – race relations and high-rise housing for instance,' Marwick maintains the 1960s were, if not quite 'a golden age', still 'a time of release and change'.[1]

Nowhere was there more evidence of release and change than in the realms of censorship. The 'great liberation for printed literature', to borrow John Sutherland's words, occurred on 21 July 1959, when the Obscene Publications Act (sponsored by then Labour backbencher, Roy Jenkins) passed into law. This opened the gates. But real freedom from censorship for literature – 'the crucial blow for the freedom of literature and publishing alike' – was decisively won in November 1960 when a jury of three women and nine men returned a verdict of 'not guilty' in the prosecution of Penguin Books for publication of the unexpurgated version of D. H. Lawrence's novel, *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, thereby making it 'available for the first time to the public in the United Kingdom'. Decensorship, Sutherland argues,

played a significant part in the transformations of the 1960s. 'The 1960s released all sorts of new energies and dissidence. Television, stage and film chafed against restriction,' he goes on. Furthermore , 'As Roy Jenkins put it in a phrase which the *Daily Telegraph* will throw back in his face for ever more – the permissive society was the civilised society. Liberalisation was fought every inch, but its tide in the 1960s was irresistible'.[2]

So, too, the theatre and film censors appeared to agree. Sir Norman Gwatkin, the Lord Chamberlain's Comptroller, highlighted what he viewed as a grim situation for theatre:

> The Lord Chamberlain cannot, even if he wished to do so, for ever travel in a horse carriage; he is now in a motor car and many people are trying to force him into a spaceship . . . You would probably be surprised to know how much we cut out in words and how much we warn about business, but since the evidence at the trial of *Lady Chatterley* I am beginning to wonder who one is trying to protect.

John Trevelyan, Secretary at the BBFC from 1958, adopted a more upbeat tone for the epigram of the book he wrote after his retirement in 1971: 'Times change and we change with them.'[3]

Gwatkin need not have worried unduly. There were sufficient numbers of people who felt sure they continued to require some form of urgent protection and his office received a regular postbag from 'disgruntled' members of the public, protesting at the 'filth' they witnessed for themselves on the stage and seeking its immediate removal. They did not wish to see any loss in steering power and sought instead increased control of the wheel. That much is evident from the reaction afforded two key stage vehicles of the 1950s and 1960s, *Look Back in Anger* and *Alfie*, both of which were turned into films. In the portrayal of their iconic male characters, Jimmy Porter and Alfie Elkins, moreover, both had a lot to say about the changing representation of masculinity in British theatre and cinema between the moment of the 'angry young man' and the advent of 'swinging' London.

Look Back in Anger

John Osborne was no stranger to controversy by the time the film script of his stage play, *Look Back in Anger*, arrived for pre-production scrutiny at the BBFC in late August 1958. When first presented by the English Stage Company at the Royal Court Theatre, on 8 May 1956, the play had received a welcome and enthusiastic reception in some quarters, notably from Kenneth Tynan, but a lukewarm and occasionally hostile response in others. Most critics agreed, however, that Osborne was a dramatist to watch, if nothing else. Though not an instant box-office hit, the play's

prospects revived after the Royal Court press officer dubbed him 'a very angry young man' and the chance remark was then turned into a catch-phrase by the press. Osborne was subsequently interviewed by Malcolm Muggeridge for BBC's *Panorama*, on 9 July, and on 16 October the BBC broadcast of an excerpt from the play was watched by nearly five million people, thereby stimulating further interest. A Granada production of the full play was networked by ITV on 28 November. This exposure, coupled with Fleet Street's increasing tendency to report or embellish Osborne's every comment, added to his notoriety. He was 'the first spokesman in the London theatre' for a generation of 'angry young men'. *Look Back in Anger* undoubtedly marked the breakthrough of 'the new drama' and 'arguably the biggest shock to the system of British theatre since the advent of Shaw'. Osborne 'the rebel' had arrived, and his play was 'the sensation of 1956'.[4]

In fact, Osborne's play had already proved the source of much debate at the Lord Chamberlain's Office when the English Stage Company first submitted it for licence earlier in the year, on 27 February. Charles Heriot, the script examiner, summarised his essentially jaundiced reaction to *Look Back in Anger* in a hastily produced report of 1 March 1956:[5]

> This impressive and depressing play breaks new psychological ground, dealing with a type of man I believed had vanished twenty years ago, but which must be generally recognisable enough to write plays about. It is about the kind of intellectual that threshed about passionately looking for a cause. It usually married girls of good family, quarrelled with all their relations, and bore them off to squalor in Pimlico or Poplar where they had babies and spent all their spare time barracking Fascist meetings. In this play the venue is a large provincial town where Jimmy and Alison, his wife, share frowsty digs with Cliff, Jimmy's friend. The men run a sweet stall in the market place – both having been at a university.
>
> Cliff is platonically loving to Alison. But Jimmy, torn by his secret daemons – his sense of social and intellectual inferiority, his passionate 'feeling' that the old order is, in some way, responsible for the general bloodiness of the world today, his determination to *épater le bourgeois* at all costs and his unrealised mother fixation for the kindly, charitable mother of one of his friends (a charwoman who married an artist, completely uneducated so that Jimmy can, quite unconsciously, patronise her while he praises her goodness) – foams at Alison, insulting her parents, teasing her about her background in an angry way and generally indulging in a grand display of tantrums that only differ from those of the nursery in having an adult sexual flavour.

'The play's interest,' Heriot concluded, 'lies in its careful observation of an anteroom of hell.' Though he recommended the play for licence, he appended a list of nine specific references to be cut or altered. Once the play and Heriot's report had been read by both the Lord Chamberlain, the Earl of Scarbrough, and his then Assistant Comptroller, Brigadier Sir Norman

Gwatkin, six of his suggestions were endorsed and communicated to the Royal Court on 2 March 1956.

Tony Richardson, the play's director and assistant director of the English Stage Company, responded with Osborne's revisions. Some problems were easily, albeit reluctantly, overcome. 'Short-arsed' was changed to 'sawn off' and the line 'There's a smokescreen in my pubic hair' was altered to 'You can quit waiting at my counter, Mildred, 'cos you'll find my position closed.' Similarly, the offending couplet in one of Jimmy Porter's songs – 'I could try inversion/But I'd yawn with aversion' – was amended and expanded:

> This perpetual whoring
> Gets quite dull and boring
> So avoid the python coil
> And pass me the celibate oil.

It was a significant addition because the 'python image' was related to a key speech which they had already been requested to 'tone down'. While the new-found rhyme was allowed, the proposed amendment to Jimmy's highly vituperative attack on his wife over 'the great pleasure of lovemaking' was not. In particular, the examiners objected to continued talk of Alison as she 'lies back afterwards like a puffed-out python to sleep it off' and to 'the peaceful coil of that innocent-looking belly'. 'No' was their private 'blue pencil' comment: 'This is too much the same.' Richardson was duly informed of the approved revisions and the remaining reservations.

Since the premiere of the play was less than six weeks away and rehearsals were in progress, Tony Richardson tried another attempt to win the day:

> Naturally we are very disappointed that you cannot agree to the alterations we submitted. What, however, is absolutely vital to the play, and I would ask you most urgently to try and help us over this, is that the 'python image' – which is central to the whole thought of the play – should be retained, though of course I appreciate the necessity for softening it a little. I am sending you therefore the following possible amendments.
>
> For: 'Oh, it's not that she hasn't her own kind of passion. She has that. She just devours me whole every time as if I were some over-large rabbit and lies back afterwards like a puffed out python to sleep it off'.
>
> Read: 'Oh, it's not that she hasn't her own kind of passion. She has. The passion of a python. She just devours me whole every time as if I were some over-large rabbit.'
>
> We would be most grateful if you could help us over this.

Three possible alternatives were also offered instead of the troublesome line 'the peaceful coil of that innocent-looking belly'. They were: 'That innocent-looking belly', 'That peaceful-looking coil', or 'That peaceful-looking

belly'. Two of them were obvious attempts at circumvention and the Lord Chamberlain was not deceived. The reformulated 'python' paaragraph was allowed, dropping the allusion to Alison's post-coital state. And reference to 'That peaceful-looking coil' was permitted but with no mention of a 'belly'. Apart from a further, final revision initiated by Richardson and Osborne, for a change, which recommended dispensing with 'You little existentialist' and replacing it by 'Blimey, you ought to be Prime Minister' – which was easily approved – the final manuscript was granted a licence on 28 March, and *Look Back in Anger* was given its premiere on 8 May 1956.

Though the Lord Chamberlain's Office was ostensibly finished with this play, they had not heard the last of it. A letter was written by an irate member of the public to R. A. Butler in October 1957 urging the Home Secretary to use his 'power and influence to have the play *Look Back in Anger* by John Osborne withdrawn both from stage and (I understand) screen'. What rankled was the fact that the New Malvern Players were staging it at the local Torquay Pavilion that week. 'Surely the complete dialogue of this production could not have been passed by the censor?', the enquirer demanded, given that 'It is the conception of a deceased and depraved mentality and the outpourings of a cesspool mind.' 'I am indeed at a loss to understand how this play should reach the English stage,' he stated, as he implored finally: 'I beg of you in the interests of what is left of sanctity and sanity to give this matter your immediate and earnest attention.' 'Treat officially,' noted Butler's private secretary, before passing the letter over to the Lord Chamberlain's Office for a formal reply. The Assistant Comptroller took over the task. After pointing out that 'The Lord Chamberlain, of course, is only responsible for stage plays and censorship of the films is done by the British Board of Film Censors,' Brigadier Sir Norman Gwatkin added, sympathetically:

> The play to which you refer was submitted here some time ago and a considerable number of amendments required. When these were made the Lord Chamberlain felt that, unpleasant though the play was in many ways, it was not one that he could rightly ban in 1956. However the Lord Chamberlain is grateful to you for having troubled to write as it helps him very much in his difficult task to hear what the public reactions are.

'Tormented' of Torquay was plainly not enamoured of Mr Osborne's work. Nor, indeed, were the theatre censors exactly pleased with his efforts. Though his reputation as a new and dynamic playwright soared on the basis of *Look Back in Anger*, the examiners lamented the trend he had started for 'realistic plays'. Despite the intermittent public and occasional private criticism, by the end of 1957 Osborne had enjoyed considerable

success with both *Look Back in Anger* and its follow-up, *The Entertainer*. The dramatist was very much in demand and inevitably attracted the attention of many a film producer eager to adapt his material for the cinema. Several factors contrived, however, to prevent the likelihood of any speedy transfer from stage to screen. Though Osborne had immediately been approached with several offers for the film rights to *Look Back in Anger*, for instance, including one from John and James Woolf of Romulus Films in the autumn of 1956, he was keen on retaining a close working relationship with Tony Richardson, who had brought him such notoriety and success.

Life for both of them, furthermore, was nothing if not exceptionally busy. *Look Back in Anger* transferred from the Royal Court to the Lyric Theatre, Hammersmith, on 5 November 1956, and was then taken back to the Court on 11 March 1957, each occasion involving extensive cast changes and further rehearsal time. *The Entertainer* transferred to the Palace Theatre, again with cast changes. Meanwhile, the original Royal Court cast of *Look Back in Anger* was reassembled by Tony Richardson for an American production and all decisions on film matters were postponed until after its Broadway premiere on 1 October 1957.

The acclaim which greeted the Broadway presentation of *Look Back in Anger* not only confirmed Osborne's reputation as a playwright of note but also produced an 'angel' for their film plans in the form of Harry Saltzman. Saltzman, a Quebec-born North American and 'a natural entrepreneur', capitalised on the play's new-found international reputation and Richard Burton's reported interest in playing the part of Jimmy Porter, to extract a budget of between £200,000 and £250,000 from Warner Brothers and Associated British-Pathé. Saltzman, Osborne and Richardson formed Woodfall Films to ensure they retained artistic control and a measure of independence. Given their inexperience of feature-film production, however, some compromises were inevitable at the outset. Of the original cast, for example, only Mary Ure was retained for the role of Alison, and Claire Bloom, who like Burton had a cinema following, was brought in for the part of Helena. Nigel Kneale, an accomplished writer for film and television and author of BBC TV's 1953 sensational science-fiction serial, *The Quatermass Experiment*, was engaged to adapt Osborne's play for the screen. Osborne provided 'additional dialogue' and received his share in the sale of the film rights of his play. Richardson, for his part, got nothing by way of a fee for directing.[6]

Kneale's draft film script of *Look Back in Anger* consciously opened the play out and located several sequences outside the immediate confines of the Porters' claustrophobic flat. In particular, he added more business

Figure 8 Richard Burton and Claire Bloom star in Tony Richardson's screen version of John Osborne's play *Look Book in Anger* (GB, 1959). Woodfall/Associated British/The Kobal Collection

showing Jimmy and Cliff as they run their market stall, as well as a scene in which Alison visits a doctor to confirm her pregnancy and enquires, 'Is it too late to do anything?' (In the play, this dialogue about a possible abortion is presented as a confidential chat between Cliff and Alison.) Some things were sacrificed, notably Jimmy's important speech about there being 'no good brave causes left' to fight for. To make up for that omission, in particular, the script introduced a new character – an Indian stall-holder who, when threatened with racist taunts and pressure, is championed by Jimmy but finally evicted from the market place. Jimmy's jazz background was elaborated and his relationship with Ma Tanner, the mother of his old friend, fleshed out by presenting her in person (as played by Edith Evans). For all the changes, however, Tony Richardson's purpose was clear: 'It is absolutely vital to get into British films the same sort of impact and sense of life that what you can loosely call the Angry Young Man cult has had in the theatre and literary worlds.' 'It is,' he maintained, 'a desperate need.'[7]

The point was not lost on the BBFC's readers when Kneale's film script of Osborne's play was presented for their consideration at the end of August

1958. They were no more happy with it than the Lord Chamberlain's Office had been with the original stage play. Audrey Field commented:[8]

> This sounds dull – and for a very good reason. It *is* dull. Class consciousness is a very common failing. But it has been chewed over enough, and *more* than enough, in the last few years. And all the chewing only makes people worse in this respect than they were before. I saw the play on television and I thought then that it was very mediocre, though good acting did a lot to make it seem better than it was. The film script is even less good, missing no opportunity of dragging in tendentious and irrelevant stuff about white people bullying Indians, etc. It packs less punch than the play and I find it difficult to assess from the censorship point of view. The story is basically 'A' but is adorned with gross and violent language which serves to make it sound like an 'X'. The proper course for the company to take would be to modify the dialogue with a view to getting an 'A' certificate. But I do not think they would do this. In default of this, we could throw our previous standards overboard and give an 'A' to the film without asking for any verbal changes. But I do not think we would do this, and I hope we would not.
>
> We have sometimes been too mealy-mouthed in the past but there is a limit to what we ought to sanction for children. And I think the limit is exceeded in certain passages of this film. The other possibility would be to allow the film uncut for 'X' and perhaps this would be politic, as many people who ought to know think John Osborne's work beyond criticism.

A long list of offending words and phrases was appended with notice of the fact that 'The bloodies are not spared in this script and are usually ugly in the context.' Field took particular exception to the mention of a possible abortion and reacted to Jimmy's 'great pleasure of lovemaking speech' in precisely the same way the theatre censors had responded to it from the outset, highlighting the 'python' reference as a potential problem. This was no great surprise, perhaps, given that talk of Alison's post-coital reaction – 'she lies back afterwards like a puffed-out python to sleep it off' – had been cannily reinserted. Jimmy's continual vilification of his wife was frowned upon, once again, not least his lines: 'I want to see you grovel. I want to see your face rubbed in the mud.' 'This element of sado-masochism' clearly justified an 'X' certificate, Field felt, especially 'when coupled with some fairly frank love stuff.' 'Perhaps I am off beam in even thinking it a bad "X",' she pondered, before suggesting an instant remedy for Jimmy Porter's ills: 'It's just that it seems to me such a wearisome fuss about nothing that couldn't be cured by hard manual labour or going off to the Dominions out of reach of the in-laws.'

A second BBFC script reader, Frank Crofts, shared many of Field's misgivings and clearly felt Jimmy Porter's masochistic streak extended beyond the bounds of his private and personal relationship with Alison:

> It is astonishing that anyone should consider this anything but trite and dreary rubbish. One can imagine Jimmy up to a point though I think he is rather a caricature. But one

> cannot have sympathy with him, with his self-pity, his love-hate silliness, his bullying and his masochistic wish not to take advantage of his education. As for Alison and Helena, they are unreal. Alison married Jimmy because he was sun-burnt when she first saw him and because her family (naturally) didn't like him. Helena actively disliked him till she suddenly seduced him. One simply cannot believe a well educated, reasonable girl falling for a seedy little twerp like him. One can put up with his boorishness, his cruelty and his stupidity, but not with his being such a bore.

Having served for a lengthy spell in the Indian civil service before joining the BBFC in 1948, Crofts was particularly upset that the script's references to India were frequently wrong when mentioning Alison's father, Colonel Redfern. 'No one from India brings a household of Indian furniture back with them,' he continued, and 'Gurkhas don't have daggers but very heavy sharp knives known as khukris.' At the last, however, for all his reservations, Crofts differed from Field in concluding: 'I don't think this is really "X". I think it should be passed for "A".'

John Trevelyan, then, had to deal with a conflict of opinion among his readers. Whereas one basically felt the completed film should be given an 'X' certificate, the other believed it would probably pass for the 'A' category. His dilemma was compounded by other matters which required serious attention given that the prospect of a film based on a John Osborne play clearly posed additional problems of note. Osborne, plainly, was perceived as the spearhead of a new movement, in both theatre and literature, which threatened to invade the domain of the cinema and could hardly be treated lightly. Not that Trevelyan intended doing anything of the sort. He had, after all, his own good reasons for wanting to establish where the angry young men would fall in the canon of film censorship, and these lay largely in his overall wish to promote 'adult' films of 'quality' and his desire to lend greater respectability to the 'X' category. *Look Back in Anger*, like *Room at the Top*, which Trevelyan was dealing with concurrently, had just the right credentials – literary pedigree and 'realist' concerns – to accommodate such ambitions. It presented yet another opportunity to settle the critical consensus that Trevelyan wanted to see established for the 'X' certificate.[9]

Trevelyan, therefore, marshalled all the arguments he could possibly muster when seeking to persuade the film-makers of the value in accepting an 'X' on this occasion. He began by inviting Frederick Gotfurt, the scenario editor at Associated British, to his office for a discussion on the BBFC's reservations over the script, following it up the next day with a letter summarising the major points at issue:

> This script presents us with a rather unusual problem. The story is basically one which would be eligible for the 'A' category but the dialogue is not suitable for this

> category. The question then arises whether we work on the basis that the film will have an 'X' certificate, in which case I think we could accept this script virtually unaltered, or whether we work on the basis that the film will have an 'A' certificate, in which case there would, I think, have to be quite a number of alterations to the dialogue. I personally would be most reluctant to alter the dialogue to any extent since I think it will be difficult to establish the character of Jimmy Porter if his language is toned down. In any case this is an important play and people who have seen the play in London will expect the dialogue and characterisations to be roughly the same.
>
> I hope therefore that the company will be prepared to accept an 'X' certificate. But I realise that they may feel that an 'X' certificate will attract not only a smaller audience but an audience which would include some who will be disappointed not to find what is all too frequently shown in this category. As I explained to you, it has always been our intention and hope that the films in the 'X' category would be largely those with adult themes and adult treatment, but I have to admit that it has not always worked out this way except in the case of certain films. I think one can claim that, although the story is one which would be suitable for the 'A' category, the theme behind the story is really adult.

Trevelyan proceeded to outline an extensive list comprising no less than twenty-four significant items which gave rise for concern. Though he welcomed a further meeting to elaborate these matters, if required, his preferred course of action was made abundantly clear – they should agree to take an 'X' certificate. The incentives he offered in that regard, and the probable pitfalls, were plain to see:

> I would of course be prepared to discuss these points in detail, one by one, and we might not insist on all of those that I have listed, but I think I have given enough to show you that we would probably require a number of dialogue alterations. I am somewhat influenced in my opinion that this would be better as an 'X' film by the fact that you have a really good cast, and I think that Richard Burton's performance as Jimmy will have a considerable impact which will heighten his sado-masochistic treatment of Alison.

Gotfurt returned for another discussion two weeks later, this time bringing Harry Saltzman with him. Obviously, they were both worried about the prospect of an 'X' certificate and its likely effect on the box-office potential of their film. Trevelyan reiterated his fears about 'the forthright language used' and Jimmy's sado-masochistic treatment of Alison. It was decided they would definitely omit the word 'Christ' – 'a word that we prefer not to have even in the "X" category' – and seek substitutes for 'bitch', 'virgin' and 'bastard'. In addition, they would carefully consider the 'implied references to abortion' so as to render them 'intelligible to adults and unintelligible to children'. Trevelyan, for his part, conceded that 'scripts are apt to be misleading' and that 'some of the dialogue which appears offensive on paper may well sound less offensive in the completed film'. After hearing

Saltzman's ideas regarding their production plans, he was willing to accept that 'the important scenes will be treated with sincerity and restraint'. 'When we see the film,' he promised finally, 'we will give fair consideration to your request that it should have an "A" category.' 'I cannot of course,' he concluded, 'commit the Board to a category at this stage.'

One can only speculate about Saltzman's reactions to the meeting: whether he believed they could provide sufficient 'sincerity and restraint' to merit an 'A'; whether he was more impressed by Trevelyan's persuasive arguments that they should settle for an 'X'; or whether, quite simply, he was determined most of all upon bringing the film to fruition in a fashion that best pleased its makers. Whatever the reasons, only five of Trevelyan's list of twenty-four suggested amendments had been made when the film was completed and presented for award of a certificate in the spring of 1959. In particular, the passing reference to abortion was left precisely as intended in the original version. But by the start of 1959, of course, Trevelyan had already dealt with the finished film of *Room at the Top* and had pretty much resolved, to his own satisfaction at least, the thorny problem of what constituted 'adult' films and 'quality' cinema. *Look Back in Anger* was therefore given the 'X' rating it had been virtually guaranteed at the outset, and no cuts were required.

Alfie

Bill Naughton's stage play of *Alfie* was based on his radio play, *Alfie Elkins and his Little Life*, which was first presented on the BBC's *Third Programme* from 9.10 p.m. to 10.25 p.m. on 7 January 1962 in a production by Douglas Cleverdon. The radio play was much shorter than the later stage version, and a key abortion scene, depicting a successful termination of pregnancy, was also briefly dealt with and discreetly placed towards the end of the drama. Nonetheless, audience research revealed that some listeners found it 'difficult to stomach' and there were criticisms from a minority of the sample that the programme was 'really too sordid for words'. 'Time was,' one listener complained, 'when the BBC would not have considered broadcasting anything so revolting.' Another maintained it was 'not so much kitchen sink as kitchen garbage tin', while a schoolmaster who had enjoyed previous Bill Naughton plays wrote that 'after the first half-hour it became progressively more nauseating; only curiosity as to whether it could get any worse kept me listening after the revolting abortion scene'. 'We know Mr Naughton's gift for portraying working-class life,' he concluded, but 'I regret he should have become so tasteless – what happened to his sense of humour?'

But most listeners claimed to have enjoyed the broadcast, thereby producing 'an appreciation index of 73, well above the current average (63) for *Third Programme* features.' Furthermore, audience reaction among the sample listening public who heard all or most of the play was decidedly favourable:

> A large majority of the sample had a high opinion of the programme and had evidently been completely absorbed, even fascinated; it was a memorable piece, some said, which still haunted them. Bill Naughton who continued to be 'a miraculous observer' had produced a brilliant and 'painfully acute' portrait of Alfie, a Cockney character almost impervious to all interests save hard cash and women. It seemed, many listeners said, completely authentic, a moving, spell-binding, disturbing portrayal of an immature man to whom cold self-interest had become the one value he recognised but in whom still survived (bewildering to himself) better impulses which tried to struggle to the surface. Much of what Alfie Elkins said and did was 'appalling', but yet they could not wholly dislike him, listeners sometimes said; his candour and lack of hypocrisy were redeeming features. This 'pithy analysis' was commended as unsentimental ('I liked the unemotional almost documentary slant'); neither did the author indulge in tedious 'moralising'. 'Richly comic' in places, the programme trod the dividing line between comedy and sordid tragedy with complete assurance. It was colourful throughout and the dialogue delighted many listeners by its realism and authenticity ('astonishingly accurate'). Criticisms of any aspect of the production were few indeed. The vivid way in which Alfie and his life had been communicated to the listener was often warmly praised and Bill Owen [as Alfie] was frequently spoken of in the highest terms.

Given the undoubted popularity the play had enjoyed, it was little wonder the BBC chose to repeat the broadcast. It was repeated twice on the *Third Programme* during 1962, in fact, at 6.30 p.m. on 3 February and at 8 p.m. on 11 September. On 16 September, moreover, it was reviewed by *The Critics* including Stephen Potter, Dilys Powell, and Edward Lucie-Smith, where once again it was favourably received and highly praised. It was agreed that the play 'did have a very strong moral basis' though reservations were expressed about the abortion scene, which some found 'excessive'.[10]

Clearly, Bill Naughton must have heard enough to convince him the play was well worth expanding and adapting for full stage presentation, which he duly did. Since he was already contracted to the Mermaid Theatre for a production in March 1963 of his play *All in Good Time*, it made sense to add *Alfie* to Bernard Miles's programme as part of a short Naughton season, with a first night planned for the latter on 19 June 1963. Neither play, of course, escaped the strictures of the Lord Chamberlain's Office.

Initially, at least, *All in Good Time* engendered something of a hostile reaction as far as the Lord Chamberlain's play reader, Maurice Coles, was concerned. Plainly perturbed at the likelihood of a play which he felt

would probably give offence in some quarters – for its chosen theme, as well as its mode of expression – his reservations were expressed on both fronts in a long and jaundiced report of 18 January 1963, which began:

> Whether or not you decide to license this play depends upon the overall policy of the Lord Chamberlain. The subject of the play is male impotence. Most of the play is concerned with the inability of the bridegroom, Arthur Fitton, to consummate his marriage to Violet; with the effect this knowledge has on his parents – Ezra and Lucy Fitton – and on his bride's parents – Mr and Mrs Piper; and with the reasons for Arthur's impotence. Both families are working class, so the subject is discussed from every possible angle in language which is often crude. In the course of the play it is suggested, among other things, that Ezra Fitton has – or had – homosexual tendencies, had himself been impotent with his wife throughout his married life, and that Arthur is in fact the result of an affair between Lucy Fitton and Ezra's best friend (to whom Ezra was unnaturally attracted), who disappeared after he had seduced Lucy.

Coles proceeded to outline in detail no less than twenty-two passages which he felt required to be further and carefully scrutinised. Five of them were deemed especially troublesome: a crude joke about the first-night prank done to a newly married couple in which 'fine crystals' were put between the sheets of their bed; Ezra's cursing when he cannot find a bedroom chamber-pot and his recourse to the colloquialism 'sod'; a fleeting reference to 'the safe period system' of contraception; and, in the realms of 'language', once again, use of the phrase 'beggar off'. A warning was also issued against the proposed bit of stage 'business' in which Arthur 'slowly edges her [his bride] to the bed and brings her down on it'.[11]

When passed on afterwards to the Lord Chamberlain for summary comment on the play's worth, however, matters soon took a decided turn for the better. Although it was agreed that the five highlighted areas of key concern should certainly be changed or cut out altogether – not least, the occasional words such as 'sod' or 'beggar off', and the promised stage 'business' on the bed – Lord Scarbrough, for his part, approved of allowing the play to progress into production. He was less certain whether *All in Good Time* would turn out to be widely popular or generally appealing in the eyes of theatregoers. But he was sure that it hardly merited substantial revision for all that, and the play even merited a modicum of praise in Scarbrough's opinion:

> I have read this through. It is not obscene. The question to be decided is whether the main subject presents too much embarrassment. I think the present generation can take it quite easily. It seems to me rather well put together. Whether an audience wider than the present generation – i.e. including older people – will take to it, must await their judgment. It may be licensed.

Further comment was forthcoming from the Assistant Comptroller, Eric Penn, who also decided 'There is nothing disgusting in it.' 'This play is entirely about a newly-married couple not being able to sleep with each other. There are long discussions on the reason why and every encouragement given to them by both sets of parents,' he added, but 'Victory is achieved in the end.' Albeit clearly determined to introduce a doleful note into the deliberations, as ever, when raising the question 'Is this the sort of discussion that one wishes to hear in a theatre?', Penn, too, was grudgingly resigned to let the play pass, and concluded: 'I suppose it is acceptable in 1963.' In the event, however, the Lord Chamberlain's Office still considered that *All in Good Time* required to be carefully watched and followed up in view of the possibility, especially, that new-found stage business might be introduced during the course of rehearsals. Thus, while pre-production scrutiny of the play script had done its job well enough, other measures were available to be utilised in the cause of continued censorship vigilance. Post-production review of the final stage presentation, in effect, was one further course of action that was often employed (and also rigorously applied in the case of *Alfie*).

Given that the script had already received the nod of approval from the Lord Chamberlain himself, Penn enquired whether the usual stipulation that 'plays that may give cause for complaint be checked three days after the first performance' would need to be applied in the case of Naughton's *All in Good Time*, and he queried whether it should be done on this occasion. 'Much as I dislike having to say so,' the Assistant Secretary replied, 'I think there is too much bedroom [business] and that the action *does* want a check.' His note was accompanied by the cynical, if perhaps pragmatic, comment: 'I don't trust any manager these days.' On viewing the play for himself, at last, Eric Penn was reassured that all was well and he confirmed the now widely held opinion among the examiners that 'it is not disgusting but very funny'.[12]

So it proved as far as many theatre audiences were concerned, moreover, thereby further enhancing the play's commercial prospects and virtually guaranteeing its certain adaptation for the cinema. Unlike Naughton's companion-piece of *Alfie*, however, the transition from stage to screen for *All in Good Time* followed a smoothly transacted and easily negotiated path. In the event, the BBFC found no more to worry about the Boulting brothers' retitled film of *The Family Way*, in 1966, than the Lord Chamberlain's men had some years previously, in 1963, with *All in Good Time* [13]. And that, principally, was because the BBFC took its lead from the Lord Chamberlain's Office. *Alfie*, by contrast, encountered innumerable problems with the theatre examiners. It required substantial discussions

and revisions – a process which was endured in large measure over again when the screenplay was eventually tendered by director Lewis Gilbert for pre-production scrutiny at the BBFC.

With a first night planned for 19 June 1963, the script of Bill Naughton's play, *Alfie*, was sent for licence to the Lord Chamberlain's Office on 20 January 1963, two days after *All in Good Time* had come up for scrutiny. Its origins as a radio play were evident in some of the dramatic techniques contemplated for the stage Moreover, the import of the abortion scene, now much elaborated, could not be missed. The play reader, Maurice Coles, reported his comments on the same day, as follows:

> This is the study of the sexual adventures of a Cockney wide boy, Alfie Elkins. Alfie himself is the narrator and fairly long sections of the play are narrative soliloquies as Alfie tells his story to the audience. According to him, his sex life is one long struggle against his better nature, against his yearnings for domesticity – but habit dies hard and the end of the play sees him without a woman once again but looking forward to the next one.
>
> The play is well in the fashionable rut of sordid realism – the more sordid the better – includes an abortion on stage (though behind a screen) complete with groans and cries of pain which I cannot think can be allowed and to which I have drawn attention in the list of possible deletions and alterations below . . . This is the abortion scene, involving Lily, Alfie and the abortionist. The abortion takes place on stage, behind a screen, and little is left to the imagination. There is even a description of the foetus and Alfie's disposal of it by flushing it down the lavatory. Just how much, if any, of this scene is to be allowed I leave to you . . . It is perhaps worth mentioning that this play is by the same author as *All in Good Time* which deals with male impotence and which I returned to you a day or so ago. It seems that *Alfie* is to follow the play at the Mermaid. Is there to be a third, forming a sort of trilogy of the sex life of the mole?

'Cut. Cut it all,' was the Assistant Comptroller's response to the reader's query as to how much of the abortion scene might be allowed. Eric Penn was also unhappy with the play generally, and said as much in a memorandum to the Lord Chamberlain: '*Alfie* is a dull and horrid play.' 'Its only merits are the Cockney language of the script', he continued, 'and possibly the representation of life in the East End.' In that regard he was willing to concede that 'many questionable bits of language have been let go in our recommendations'. However, his unease was evident all the same and even concessions over language were grudgingly given. 'This play is rougher than *All in Good Time*', he stated, and 'If this is really considered entertainment in 1963, perhaps it should be allowed; if so it will be interesting to see the reaction.' The abortion scene, however, simply could not be allowed. The Lord Chamberlain agreed and required that it be 'altered or omitted altogether'.[14]

Since they were plainly determined not to be beaten in the matter of the abortion scene, if nothing else, the Mermaid Theatre marshalled its arguments and forces accordingly. 'In view of the fact that this play was presented on the *Third Programme* and received magnificent press,' Bernard Miles wrote in reply, 'may I bring the author and Mr Ide [the theatre administrator] along to discuss the matter in person?' So, indeed, he did. Plainly, the Lord Chamberlain's men were open to discussion, at least. But while they proved malleable on some matters, they were intransigent on others and the resulting discussions were not wholly to the visitors' liking:

> At their request, Bernard Miles and Bill Naughton were interviewed by Col. Penn and Mr Hill [assistant secretary]. The cuts in this piece were agreed by them without question, except for the abortion scene, which is indeed a climacteric in Alfie's life. Our opposition to this scene was influenced by the fact that a scene revolving around the preparations for and after effects of an abortion were all in *I Am a Camera* in 1954. Mild though these were they did give offence.
>
> It was explained to the visitors that it was accepted by the Lord Chamberlain that the play was a moral rather than an immoral one, and that it was realised that the basic facts of life were nowadays discussed freely in any company; but that in our opinion some of the clinical and practical detail in the play was of such a disgusting nature in the literal sense of the word that it was felt that to sanction it would give a precedent for action and properties which could end by blunting the sensibilities of and indeed brutalising the audience. Our viewpoint was accepted at least as a tenable one and Mr Miles read through the abortion scene which was reviewed from that aspect.

If the extraordinary read-through which followed there and then, on the spot, extracted one notable concession, it also highlighted a host of potential problems. The abortion scene might just be allowed, it seemed, but 'the operation ought to be conducted off-stage', thereby also necessitating the removal of large amounts of vital dialogue and associated business. There should be no 'jingle of instruments' nor talk of 'scrubbing away' on the abortionist's part; and no 'cries', 'groans', 'sudden pain and winces' from Lily. 'Remember, the bed is to be off-stage,' it was stated, and the abortionist should 'leave the stage instead of going behind the screen'. Finally, and equally important, most references to disposal of the aborted foetus should be deleted.

Though Bernard Miles and Bill Naughton expressed a willingness to operate within these constraints and to produce a rewritten abortion scene which incorporated the new proposals, they understandably wanted some 'assurance' they would not be 'wasting their time' on the revisions. They sought, in short, advance approval for their efforts since that would provide 'sufficient basis upon which to undertake the additional work'. It was a shrewd and clever move but never likely to win the day. Inevitably, no such

assurance was forthcoming. Still, the examiners were more hopeful of a successful outcome to everybody's endeavours:

> It is felt that the scene even when rewritten will be a strong one and will inevitably give offence particularly to some ladies. Nevertheless the play is a straightforward depiction of what is unfortunately a real type, the facts of the play tend to social not anti-social ends, and the acceptance by most people these days of any subject for discussion – VD, homosexuality, etc. – make the scene in our opinion acceptable if not eminently desirable.

In the final analysis, of course, the key decision on revisions to the script rested with the Lord Chamberlain. Moreover, the Lord Chamberlain had just changed. When *Alfie* first landed on the play reader's desk, Lord Scarbrough had been in charge. Now it was Lord Cobbold. However, he was no more inclined to give advance approval than his predecessor had been. Once he had been apprised of the situation by his Assistant Comptroller, and done his homework appropriately, Cobbold endorsed everything the Mermaid representatives had already been told:

> I have read this play and attached papers and also the relevant sections of *I Am a Camera*. The latter seem to be innocuous and not to set too much of a precedent for this scene. I agree that the modifications of the abortion scene proposed at your meeting with Mr Miles and the author make it a lot less objectionable: in particular I am sure that all action relating to the abortion must take place off-stage. But my present feeling is that the scene, even if rewritten on the lines of the interview with Mr Miles, would still be likely to give offence to a lot of people.
>
> I cannot give a definite decision without seeing a rewrite. Nor can I give any commitment not to ask for further alteration. If Mr Miles and the author think it worthwhile to have another shot at it on this understanding, I shall of course be very willing to look at it.

'The Lord Chamberlain is still disturbed about the possible effects of this [abortion] scene', Bernard Miles was told emphatically, and 'feels very dubious about the whole of it'. 'Even with the modification which we agreed provisionally between us,' it was reiterated, 'he is still not prepared to give an unqualified assurance that the scene will be allowed.'

The ball, quite simply, was back in Miles's and Naughton's court. A new script was produced on 3 May 1963. It was, they promised, 'entirely revised and rewritten'. In truth, it was nothing of the sort. If their reaction was predictable as far as the abortion scene was concerned, which was suitably toned down to meet the theatre examiners' needs, they now proved less than willing to accommodate the other demands made of them. Hoping, perhaps, that arguments over the abortion scene had taken the new Lord Chamberlain's mind off everything else required by the readers,

Naughton had quietly proceeded to forget about them. If one battle had been lost, the war was still engaged. But some examiners were ever alert. The reader of the rewritten script – Maurice Coles, once again – commented on 20 May 1963:

> The play has been considerably revised though the general outline of the plot remains unchanged. I have studied the correspondence and memoranda relating to the play and although a lot has been done to tone down the abortion scene, with the operation itself taking place off-stage, some objectionable matter remains. I notice also that no notice has been taken of the other cuts or amendments, outside the abortion scene, called for in your letter of 25 January.

Although the Assistant Comptroller also admitted that the new edition had been 'considerably tidied up from the original', not least regarding the abortion, he too felt prompted to remind the Mermaid Theatre of what had previously been required by way of exceptions generally. For good measure, he added a list of exceptions to material which appeared for the first time in the revised script. Once everything had been dealt with, and not before, the play would be granted a licence. A long, carefully detailed reply from the Mermaid management on 30 May, with further revisions, finally put paid to all the Lord Chamberlain's objections, and *Alfie* was given a licence on 5 June 1963, exactly two weeks to the day before its opening night destined for 19 June. Lest they be taken by surprise, however, plans were made at the Lord Chamberlain's Office on 17 June to ensure the finished production also met with approval. 'I see that this play by Bill Naughton containing the abortion scene etc., etc., is being presented at the Mermaid for the first time on Wednesday 19 June,' Eric Penn recorded. 'In view of the contents of this play, I think that this should be inspected very early on and may arrangements therefore be made for this to happen either on the first or second night.'

The assistant secretary, Ronald Hill, was duly dispatched to watch the play on the second night of presentation and the results of his 'incognito inspection' were immediately forthcoming. While he was clearly satisfied with the staging of the abortion scene – and, indeed, noted the producers had done more than required of them – he plainly had reservations regarding other bits of stage 'business', not to mention a profound distaste for the play, generally, as he reported on 21 June 1963:

> I went last night to the Mermaid Theatre to see *Alfie*. I occupied stall no. D23 and I enclose the programme. The play reads better than it acts and I thought the acting, with the exception of John Neville, so bad that at times the piece instead of being tragi-comedy came perilously close to bathos. Generally speaking, and for these days, there was nothing to which real exception could be taken . . .

1. Reference to 'putting your knee on the steering wheel' – still there which was prohibited.

2. A piece of 'business' – 'Alfie throws back the girl's draws' – surprised we had allowed.

3. Unscripted 'business' with Alfie showing there was no hot water bottle in bed, therefore no intercourse tonight.

4. In several respects the producer has modified what the Lord Chamberlain has allowed – the reference to Lily and Alfie not taking precautions is dropped, and so is all 'business' of a clinical sort connected with the abortion. The practioner merely calls and goes out with Lily to another room, and she comes back in a dressing gown.

5. 'Breast squeezing' . . . 'business' with Ruby in 'house coat and undies'.

We have in our strait-laced past always forbidden breast squeezing and if you admit even a short squeeze you lose complete control: lengthened squeezes, other actions, and greater degrees of breast nudity then follow and short of seeing every performance it is impossible to decide what is really impermissible and what is mildly objectionable. Personally, I would stop this act completely.

If the assistant secretary was not impressed by the play or the cast, apart from John Neville – which included Glenda Jackson and Gemma Jones in leading roles – a good many people were. The Mermaid was doing considerable business. And 'breast squeezing', inevitably, was sufficient cause for concern to the censors in itself. To settle his mind on that score, once and for all, the Assistant Comptroller dutifully trooped along to see the play as well. While the assistant secretary's viewing had been done 'incognito' though still 'official', however, the Assistant Comptroller's visit was 'open' and acknowledged by all parties. Penn responded on 27 June:

> We discussed this play this morning as a result of Hill's official visit (incognito) on the 20 June and my own open visit on 26 June. I phoned Bernard Miles this morning and have explained the Lord Chamberlain's rule that breasts may not be touched. I explained the reason for this is the difficulty in establishing a dividing line between brushing gently against the bosom and gripping them. Bernard Miles said that he appreciated this and will have any touching or handling of the breasts of Ruby immediately stopped. I accepted his suggestion that Alfie could outline the shape of Ruby's bosom with the hand at a safe distance away and he said that if anyone from the Lord Chamberlain's office wished to come and see this new arrangement, he hoped they would do so . . .

It was, of course, hardly necessary. No more visits were required – 'incognito', 'official', open or otherwise. The Lord Chamberlain's Office had done its job well enough. Not that everybody was satisfied. The Stage Plays Sub-Committee of the Public Morality Council, for example, sent its own 'reporter' along to view *Alfie* and felt certain some things had been slipped

in after submission with regard to the abortion scene, especially. It noted in a letter to the Lord Chamberlain of 12 September:

> [We] discussed this play which came under severe criticism embodying as it does seduction, abortion, adultery and in the view of the Committee was thoroughly objectionable, despite the skill demonstrated by Mr John Neville in the chief part. The penultimate scene seemed so bad to our reporter as to cause him to wonder whether it had been in fact added after submission to your Lordship for licensing. Whatever the facts are, my Committee would request some word from your Lordship as to the reasons which influenced you in granting a licence for a play of this deplorable character.

The Lord Chamberlain was particularly well placed to respond on this occasion, given the extent of scrutiny afforded *Alfie* at both the pre-production and post-production stages, and did so just two weeks later, on 25 September:

> The scene was not allowed in its original form and at my request the author modified it radically. To be sure the scene was played in an acceptable manner, by modern standards, I arranged for it to be inspected and was informed that the producer had conformed entirely to my directions. The play certainly deals with unpleasant subjects and may not be to everybody's taste. But I hope that your Committee would agree that this is not of itself sufficient reason for banning the play. My endeavour is to form a judgement, admittedly not easy, as to whether such subjects are treated seriously or otherwise, whether the production would normally be regarded as an incitement or a deterrent to immorality, and whether particular scenes or words would, in the present broad state of public opinion, cause general offence to the theatregoing public. The present production (after considerable cuts and alterations at my request) seemed to justify a licence. I think, if I may say so, without disrespect to your Committee, that the attitude of responsible critics and of the general theatregoing public towards the production confirms my judgement.

Norman Gwatkin, the Comptroller, added by way of a cryptic, if strictly confidential comment to the Lord Chamberlain's letter: 'I particularly like this last sentence and I hope they will appreciate the word "responsible". They make occasional sallies in order that they may say that they have done so in the book being produced now and again to wheedle subscriptions from gullible old ladies.' In the event, however, the Lord Chamberlain did not get off entirely on this occasion. Another letter from the Public Morality Council, on 9 October 1963, made it abundantly clear it did not agree with the Lord Chamberlain's point of view:

> I am to suggest that the claims of 'broad-mindedness' should not be accorded too ready an acceptance by your Lordship. Broad-mindedness, in fact, is generally a euphemism for departures from what are generally recognised as decencies of life and it would be reassuring to my Council if you could possibly indicate how far in the direction of broad-mindedness you are prepared to go in licensing plays for

> public performance. The line must be drawn between decency and indecency and my Committee feels strongly that in much of modern entertainment (so called) that line is receding dangerously. My Committee makes this point with respect and would add that the play *Alfie* certainly did not seem to our visitors to treat seriously the important matters with which the play deals and hence came under criticism accordingly.

By the time, then, that the film script for *Alfie* landed in the BBFC's lap, in April 1965, it had been through the censorship treadmill already and shorn of several vital elements. While Bill Naughton undoubtedly grasped the opportunity offered by the prospect of a film production to reinsert some of his earlier material – generally lines of dialogue which he had clearly always treasured – the plain fact of the matter is that his script stayed within the limits of what the theatre censors had allowed. Crucially, he chose not to overstep the mark when broaching contentious issues such as abortion. Changes were made, to be sure, to accommodate the demands of working on film as much as anything else. New characters and outside locations were added by director Lewis Gilbert to flesh out the proceedings. But they were hardly substantial changes for all that. Some matters previously consigned off-stage during the abortion scene, for instance, now moved inevitably into the foreground and within view of the camera, with the abortionist plainly on show for one thing. It was done cautiously, however, without graphic or explicit depiction of any controversial aspects, and the abortion itself still took place behind a curtain. The film depended essentially upon the ingredients which had accounted for its stage success – dialogue and characterisation. Most of all, Alfie's key speech about the aborted foetus of his child remained essentially as Naughton had fashioned it to meet the Lord Chamberlain's requirements. The film-makers stayed within the confines of what had already been permitted. It is no surprise therefore, in short, that the BBFC permitted an abortion scene and concluded, moreover, that it was 'the most moral' script they had encountered in some while. Nobody had ever doubted Naughton's 'moral' intent – the BBC critics had agreed it was evident in his original radio play and the theatre examiners had conceded it was present as well. The Lord Chamberlain's Office had, though, added considerably to the realisation of his 'moral' purpose. The BBFC, for its part, merely sought to do more of the same.

It had still to be an 'X', the script reader thought, 'because of the abortion and the grossness of some of the sex talk'. But 'We really do not feel that the sex is dragged in to titillate the idle mind,' Audrey Field concluded on 28 April, and 'I think there is a case for being as lenient as possible.' John Trevelyan concurred and informed Paramount British Pictures on 4 May

1965 that 'Obviously the film could be considered only for the "X" category.' 'It is, however, a basically moral theme,' he continued, 'and if it is made with integrity, as I have every reason to think that it will be, it should not give us much trouble.' As ever, his comments on precise detail ranged high and low:[15]

> We would not object to seeing dogs sniffing each other, but there might be trouble if the behaviour of the dogs was a close parallel of what was going on in the car. We are a bit concerned about the script direction '. . . adjusts his trousers and generally makes himself less uncomfortable'. Discretion should be used here. The same applies to Siddie '. . . hitching up her skirt and tidying herself up'.
>
> We think that you should omit the shot of Alfie taking the pair of panties from his pocket and tossing them across to Siddie with his line '. . . 'Ere mind you don't catch cold'. This is more suggestive than we would like.
>
> Although this is not a censorship point, I am doubtful whether you can get a train from Waterloo Station to Forest Hill Station. I would have thought that Victoria was more likely.
>
> Siddie's line 'So long as you don't have to give it to him', and Alfie's reply 'I would if I were built that way', may pass, but I think that you should shoot this scene in a way that would enable these lines to be removed if necessary.
>
> The same applies to the explicit references to menstruation. They may pass, but you should provide for the possibility that they may not.
>
> Here Alfie 'makes a sign' which appears to be a visual illustration of the fact that he has made his girl pregnant. I have no idea what sign is intended, but obviously care should be taken.
>
> I do not know whether the choice of a banana in this scene is intended to have any visual significance or not. Since it might possibly give this impression I suggest that you might well substitute an apple or something of this kind.
>
> I would have thought that there was no need for nudity in this scene. This kind of thing has become a cliché. It will certainly be cut if nudity is clearly visible, and at most only a backview would be accepted. I hope, however, that you will omit this entirely.
>
> Ruby's costume should be adequate and not transparent.
>
> I think the whole of this dialogue should be modified. As it stands it is descriptive of ardent love-making, and I think it would probably be cut if shot as it stands.
>
> The script description reads 'Alfie and Ruby embrace with some extravagant love-making preamble'. It should not be too extravagant. We are not too happy about the

> phrase 'lust-box'. If you make use of this I think that you should have an alternative available.
>
> These are strong scenes, but they will probably be acceptable in the context, since they do make a valid point against abortion. We would not want any really harrowing moans and screams.
>
> These could be very moving scenes. Obviously we shall not see what Alfie sees in the bathroom.
>
> We are not sure about the lines 'What, you doin' it with groups now then?' and 'Don't be disgusting'. These should be shot in a way that would enable them to be removed without difficulty if necessary.
>
> I have one other general point. I think that the phrase 'having it off with', which is used from time to time, will probably be acceptable, but here again you might have an alternative for post-synching if it should not be.

So it went on. A bit of give and take as usual along carefully laid-down and well-formulated, if ever-evolving, lines. It is no wonder that John Trevelyan once described film censorship in terms of 'a curious arrangement' and, as he aptly added, 'rather typically British in some ways'.[16] When it finally reached the screen, on 24 March 1966, *Alfie* had been through a lengthy and arduous, if sometimes fruitful, process of censorship negotiation, something which contributed substantially to its emergence as a 'basically moral' film. Moreover, it turned out to be a considerable box-office hit in both Britain and America, thereby consolidating the 'cultural revolution' which had taken root in the UK since the turn of the 1960s and cementing the success on both sides of the Atlantic during the previous few years of rock groups like the Beatles and the Rolling Stones, not to mention films like *Dr No*, *Tom Jones* and *A Hard Day's Night*. British popular culture was riding the crest of a wave.

Apart from bringing instant critical acclaim for Michael Caine in its leading role, moreover, *Alfie* won plaudits galore for a host of supporting actors including Jane Asher, Shirley Anne Field, Julia Foster, Millicent Martin, Vivien Merchant, Shelley Winters and Denholm Elliott. The film of Bill Naughton's play was followed a year later by the 1967 Abortion Act, and within two years, yet again, by the 1968 Theatres Act, which proceeded to abolish the Lord Chamberlain's powers of theatre censorship. While social change was plainly taking place in some key areas, in short, it was still lacking in others and in some respects, arguably, matters appeared hardly to have changed. Film censorship as exercised by the BBFC, after all, continues to survive.

Notes

1. Arthur Marwick's case for a 'cultural revolution' is argued extensively and persuasively in numerous publications but his key book on the period remains *The Sixties* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998).
2. John Sutherland, *Offensive Literature: Decensorship in Britain, 1960–1982* (London: Junction Books, 1982), p. 2.
3. Gwatkin is quoted in John Johnston, *The Lord Chamberlain's Blue Pencil* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1990), pp. 164–5; John Trevelyan's autobiographical account of his career is found in *What the Censor Saw* (London: Michael Joseph, 1973).
4. The critical and public reception afforded Osborne's first play to reach the London stage is discussed in John Russell Taylor (ed.), *John Osborne*: *Look Back in Anger, A Casebook* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1968), pp. 16–21, and Harry Ritchie, *Success Stories: Literature and the Media in England, 1950–1959* (London: Faber and Faber, 1988), pp. 25–31.
5. LCP Correspondence, *Look Back in Anger*, 1956/8932. Play reader's report, 1 March 1956, and all further memoranda related to same.
6. The events surrounding the transfer from stage to screen were outlined in a radio interview with Tony Richardson for *Frankly Speaking*, 12 December 1962, the script for which is held in the BBC Written Archives, Caversham. See also, 'Unwanted play starts a battle,' *Daily Mail*, 8 December 1956; 'Osborne sells for £35,000,' *Sunday Dispatch*, 13 October 1957; and Alexander Walker, *Hollywood, England: The British Film Industry in the Sixties* (London: Michael Joseph, 1974), pp. 56–60. For Nigel Kneale's career in television, see George W. Brandt (ed.), *British Television Drama* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), pp. 14 and 33. Saltzman, of course, later teamed up with Albert 'Cubby' Broccoli to produce *Dr No* (1962) and several other films in the immensely popular James Bond series.
7. Tony Richardson, 'The Man Behind an Angry-Young-Man,' *Films and Filming* (February 1959), p. 9. Penelope Houston observed Richardson at work on *Look Back in Anger* for *Sight and Sound*, 28/1 (1958/59), pp. 31–3. Osborne provided his own autobiographical account of events in *Almost a Gentleman* (London: Faber and Faber, 1991) and Richardson in *Long Distance Runner* (London: Faber and Faber, 1993).
8. BBFC file, *Look Back in Anger*. Reader's report, 28 August 1958. Remaining BBFC references come from this file.
9. Note also Ian Christie's apposite comment on the notion of 'quality' cinema: 'Above all, it reflects the deep-rooted British cultural bias towards some form of "realism", and the belief that cinema can only be judged by its literary pedigree', in *Arrows of Desire* (London: Waterstone, 1985), p. 102.
10. BBC Written Archives Caversham: *Alfie Elkins and his Little Life*, Audience Research Report, 30 January 1962 112/62/58; *The Critics*, 16 September 1962, transcript. The original radio play was repeated by the BBC yet again,

during 1992, as part of a tribute to Bill Naughton, following his death on 9 January, which comprised a short season of his plays.

11. LCP Correspondence, *All in Good Time*, 1963/3181. Play reader's report, 18 January 1963. All references hereafter come from this file.

    The play reader's reference about Ezra's 'homosexual tendencies' towards his best friend who disappeared, Billy Stringfellow, bears interesting comparison with much later gay readings of the Boulting Brothers' film version of Naughton's play. See, in particular, Vito Russo, *The Celluloid Closet: Homosexuality in the Movies* (New York: Harper and Row, 1981), pp. 147–9; and Stephen Bourne, *Brief Encounters: Lesbians and Gays in the British Cinema 1930–1971* (London: Cassell, 1996), pp. 195–9. At the time of release of *The Family Way* in 1966, however, few critics saw fit to mention it.

    Patrick Gibbs raised the question of 'a homosexual relationship' between Ezra and Billy in his review for the *Daily Telegraph* on 23 December 1966, but did not pursue the issue at all. Gibbs wondered 'Indeed, whether any of the men we see function properly', and cited various instances to advance his argument: the distinct hints of an extramarital affair between Ezra's wife and Billy before the latter's sudden departure – thereby 'appearing to be a better friend than even the husband thought' – as well as the seeming fixation evident in the girl's father for his daughter ('or was it just her plaits?'), and the matter of 'the only other wife given prominence telling her husband in a moment of anger that for years the milkman has been doing his job'. In view of the widespread 'Freudian gloss' which he felt overlaid Naughton's basic story line, in short, Gibbs clearly considered that the quesion of homosexuality was no more (or less) important than the other questions raised in the body of the film at large.

12. The Lord Chamberlain's Office had to contend with a lone dissenting voice from an irate member of the public in Poole, however, who complained that *All in Good Time* was 'a particularly indecent play which never ought to have been passed by the censor. I can only think it has escaped your notice or you would never have allowed it.' 'It is most disgusting and thoroughly indecent, as it exposes a *most* delicate subject, and is a disgrace to the British stage,' the letter continued, before concluding in forthright fashion: 'So please ban it immediately.' A reply by Eric Penn of 8 April pointed out: 'The Lord Chamberlain has the task of deciding upon what will do real harm as opposed to that which is vulgar, tasteless, or no more likely to lead to immorality or misconduct than the contributions to this end of other mediums, such as television, books, newspapers, etc.' Apart from noting that 'The views of responsible theatregoers are of great value to him in assessing the state of public opinion', Penn soon put paid to the matter by reiterating the Lord Chamberlain's judgement that 'In the form in which it has been allowed, it is felt that the play in question is acceptable.'

13. Indeed, so far as one can judge, the only film censorship applied to *The Family Way* was forthcoming when the film was banned from the Cunard Company's cruise liners in view of its 'X'-rated certificate and because 'children would

be able to see it'. The film was invested with a degree of notoriety, in short, which it hardly deserved or scarcely merited, doubtless because of a somewhat demure nude scene in which Hayley Mills is glimpsed fleetingly on emerging from a tin bath. Given that the twenty-year-old Hayley Mills, hitherto invariably treated by the press as something of 'a royal princess', was seen to be 'parted at last from her Disneyland image', to borrow Felix Barker's phrase, this was sufficient to merit considerable press headlines and much publicity for the film. It did exceptionally well in the box-office stakes, thereafter, in both Britain and the United States, where it garnered plaudits from Bosley Crowther of the *New York Times* and where its distribution rights were sold to Warner Bros for a then record initial payment of £625,000, to be followed by 35 per cent of the film's subsequent earnings – an appreciable profit on a production which had cost £400,000 to make.

But there is scant documentation of substance in the BBFC's files relating to *The Family Way* – always a sign, in itself, of the trouble-free passage which a film was afforded – to believe the film censors felt they had much to worry about with it. Moreover, a comparison of the play script with the screenplay and the completed film, and, not least, the fruits of numerous interviews conducted with the director, Roy Boulting, confirms how little was changed because of censorship strictures during the course of transition from stage to screen of *The Family Way*.

14. LCP Correspondence, *Alfie*, 1963/3492. Play reader's report, 20 January 1963, and handwritten amendments to same by E. Penn, Assistant Comptroller, along with all further memoranda related to file.
15. BBFC file, *Alfie*: reader's report, 28 April 1965, and Trevelyan's letter to Paramount British Pictures, 4 May 1965. All other BBFC references to the film come from this file.

    In fact, Michael Caine did some post-synching of the dialogue soundtrack, comprising 125 new sound loops. This was done not for censorship purposes but to render his character's 'very thick cockney accent' into 'clearer English' for strictly American consumption and the US edition of the film. For which, see the details contained in his useful autobiography, *What's It All About?* (London: Century, 1972). Clearly, lessons had been learned here by the film producers from the decided lack of success that greeted the Broadway presentation of the stage play of *Alfie*, starring Terence Stamp, when it opened at the Morosco Theatre on 17 December 1964 and ran for just twenty-one performances. Stamp maintains the play's notable failure resulted from 'A devout Catholic critic who was reputedly offended by the abortion scene, but too smart to mention the fact, found other ways of making the play seem unwatchable.' See Terence Stamp, *Double Feature* (London: Grafton, 1988), p. 147. Jean Shrimpton, Stamp's then partner, is probably as close to the truth when pointing out that 'The audience did not understand the Cockney rhyming slang; in fact they did not understand the play at all.' 'Terry was dynamic enough,' she continues, 'but this near-monologue from him in an

East End accent was baffling to the audience.' See her *An Autobiography* (London: Sphere, 1991), p. 127. By contrast, of course, the screen version of *Alfie* was a huge hit in America, as in Britain, with even Stephen Farber, the critic of the scholarly Berkeley journal, *Film Quarterly*, maintaining that 'its wit and its stubborn humanity make it seem a giant of a film today'. See *Film Quarterly*, 20/3 (1967), pp. 42–6.

16. The comment was actually made by Trevelyan in a letter to Warwickshire County Council on 8 February 1961, in regard to their continued intransigence over granting a certificate for *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning*, but it serves usefully to summarise his overall and distinctly pragmatic attitude to film censorship as exercised by the BBFC.