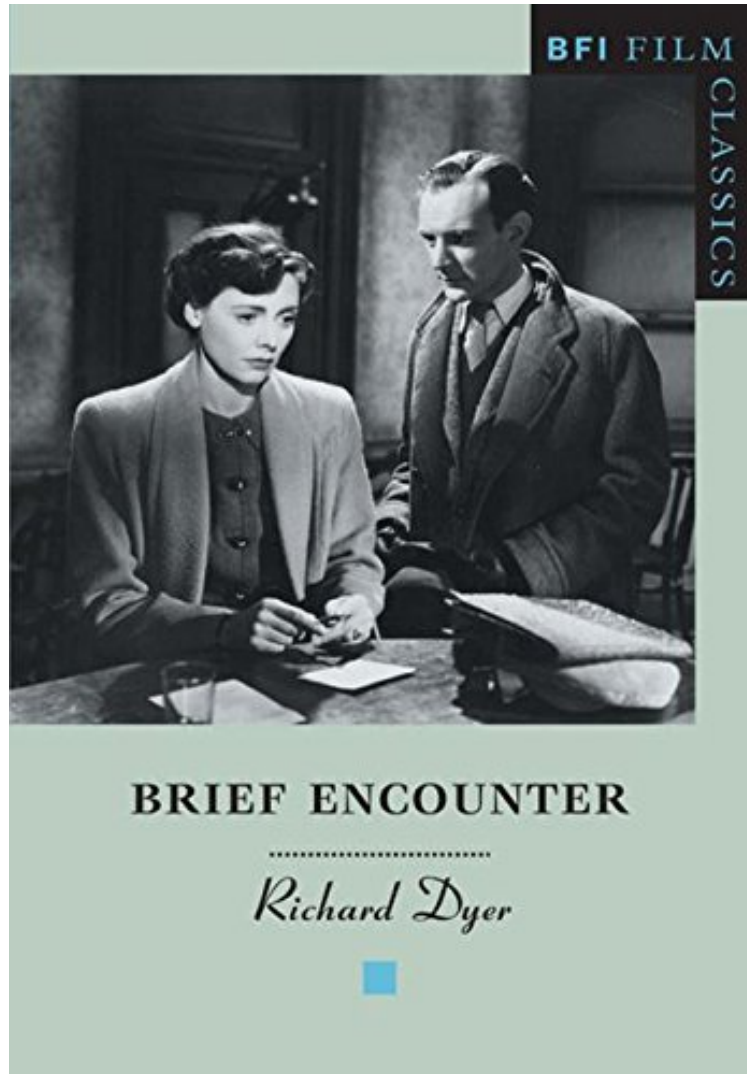


Brief Encounter (BFI Film Classics)

Richard Dyer

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Richard Dyer : Brief Encounter (BFI Film Classics) before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Brief Encounter (BFI Film Classics):

2 of 4 people found the following review helpful. A Brief Look at "Brief Encounter"By Mara KurtzIf you love the film as much as I do you will read anything that includes the title. This is very short, interesting book that reads a lot like a final paper in a graduate film class. Lots of deconstructing and the suggestion of some unusual theories (did Laura "imagine" the relationship with Alec?). Nevertheless, there is enough here to remind the reader of the great lines from the film and interesting information not found elsewhere.7 of 8 people found the following review helpful. Homage and critique powered by intelligence and love.By darragh o'donoghue'Brief Encounter' is both celebrated and despised

as THE British film par excellence. The story of a short liaison that never gets beyond boat-rides in the park and a ham-fisted rendezvous in a friend's flat, the containment of transgressive emotions within a stiff-upper-lip sensibility is seen as quintessentially British. The film is also a major example of what is known as the 'woman's picture', one whose address (its story, mood, feeling, allusions, assumptions) is primarily to women. It is both these received opinions Richard Dyer, Britain's finest academic writer on film, wishes to investigate, using, as he says, the heroine's own method in telling her story, adapting his in the light of personal experience and knowledge from others. The film's status as a woman's picture is ambiguous - the story is told by a woman (in other words, she has narrative authority), and coloured by her sensibility and the habits of her cultural consumption (the books she reads and films she sees); on the other hand, her internalised confession cannot find voice within the male-dominated world of the film. In any case, this 'woman's picture' was written, directed and made by men. Dyer, with great sensitivity, explores the many ways in which 'Encounter' offered women a space to articulate their own inner lives and social positions, as well as asserting the claims of patriarchy on them. The film's 'Britishness' is even more problematic. 'Encounter' was not a mass success, and its image of 'Britain' - English, middle-class, middlebrow, white - is very narrow and hardly representative of the major differences within one class, never mind the different classes, races and worldviews that constituted Britain even in 1946. Dyer shows how the couple's limiting their own desire is echoed in the way the film's middle-class whiteness insists on distancing itself from the social and racial Other. Nevertheless, he argues: 'A nation's characteristic culture may on inspection usually be a narrow and class-specific one, but it is nonetheless what passes for the national culture'. He also discusses the ambiguous importance of 'Encounter' for gay audiences, as both a means of camp resistance to the dominant culture (by mocking what seems to be 'quintessentially British', and implicitly exclusive), but also (as written by gay playwright Noel Coward), a displaced narrative of 'forbidden love' kept in the closet. Unfashionably, Dyer examines 'Encounter' textually, as if the film was a unified artefact that arrived fully formed out of nowhere. He is not very interested in the production process, the economic pressures on aesthetic choices, or the individual contributions of personnel (with the exception of lead actress, Celia Johnson). More fashionably, he downplays the film's 'auteur' credentials, not considering writer-producer Coward at all. The most brilliant section of the book is an analysis of the opening scene, showing us how, through camera movement and composition, director David Lean economically, even poetically sets up the film's characters and themes. More of this would have been very welcome. Still, this is a marvellous book, full of Dyer's usual generosity, lucidity and circumspection - he relates other points of view or interpretations with great fairness and precision (how very English!), before offering his own - most academics set up other writers just to knock them down. He proves that detached intellectual engagement with this brilliant film does not preclude profound emotional investment. 4 of 7 people found the following review helpful. a lovely book By seamus enright The most endearing thing about the BFI Classics series is the way film critics personalise films and avoid the sort of critical detachment and recourse to jargon that blights much contemporary film criticism. Dyer, an expert on Gay cinema and author of several excellent books on this and other aspects of film, continues this trend with a lucid study of this classic tale of heterosexual trysts. Though he plausibly argues for a gay subtext and points out how its sense of Britishness is one that depends on defining the country in opposition to other cultures, it's his detailing of how his mother viewed the film and how his own critical perceptions of the film have changed throughout the years that are most memorable. The one disappointing thing about the book is the lack of detail about the production of the film, though, as usual there are plenty of excellent shots from the set of the movie.

A study of David Lean's "Brief Encounter". In this personal account of the film, Richard Dyer traces its significance to post-war movie-goers, and the power of its enduring appeal. Each volume in the "BFI Film Classics" series contains a brief production history and a detailed filmography.

About the Author Richard Dyer is Professor of Film Studies at the University of Warwick. He is the author of Stars, Heavenly Bodies, Now You See It: Studies in Lesbian and Gay Film, Only Entertainment and The Matter of Images.