



BRITISH SCHOOLS FILM FESTIVAL #4

STUDY GUIDE FOR THE FILM **BRIGHT STAR**

Großbritannien/Frankreich/USA/Australien 2009, directed by Jane Campion

Questions for the class are organized in two categories: before viewing (bv) and after viewing (av). A work sheet with planned activities is also attached.

Synopsis:

Based on a true story about Fanny Brawne (played by Abbie Cornish) and the Romantic poet John Keats (Ben Whishaw), the film **Bright Star** takes us on a poetic journey through the ordinary mysteries of being in love. Its stunning imagery and wonderful wording not only opens our eyes and ears, it leads us yearning to use all our senses, including that of touching, smelling and even tasting. Indeed, as Keats tells Fanny intimately in the film, "A poem needs understanding through the senses... Poetry soothes and emboldens the soul to accept the mystery." Fanny smilingly responds, "I love mystery."

Written and directed by Jane Campion, the film **Bright Star** begins with a duet of intertwining voices - that of a woman and a man - accompanied by cello. Then we see a close up of a white thread being put through the hole of a needle. The music continues as the needle is poked through the virginal white cloth, laying down one stitch after another. Then we see a room bathed white in natural light. A young woman is sitting beside the window stitching, while a little girl is just getting up from a nice warm bed. Now we see four people leave a house, while white linen is billowing in the wind. We find ourselves in Hampstead Village, London 1818. With the people now approaching the door to a house, the music subsides as we can now clearly hear the words, "Hello Joy".

Yet, once inside the house, Fanny's encounter with Mr. Brown (Paul Schneider), who lives there, does not appear that joyful at all. Indeed, he even appears to be her adversary. Plainly annoyed by his behaviour towards her, he asks her what he has done to her. Quick to the mark, Fanny tersely responds, "You do nothing to me or for me. And that's how I prefer to keep it". Fanny certainly has a very sharp wit and is clearly unafraid to speak her mind. Asked to bring a cup of tea to Mr. Keats in the other half of the house, he asks her how she would describe him or his character. Smiling again, she answers, "I am not the least interested in your character." She is, however, curious about Mr. Keats writing, even sending her younger brother Samuel Brawne (Thomas Sangster) and little sister Margaret "Toots" Brawne (Edie Martin) to the bookshop to acquire his most recent work *Endymion*. There Toots tells the bookseller, "My sister has met the author and she wants to read it herself to see if he's an idiot or not."

So begins a truly loving relationship between Miss. Fanny Brawne and Mr. Keats, overshadowed however by the tragic death of his brother Tom, who dies of tuberculosis, a common illness of the time. Hearing of his loss, Fanny tenderly stitches a pillow slip with the design of a leafy tree upon it. Deeply touched, Mr. Keats says, "I will rest Tom's head upon it". Sad and with no financial means of his own, the rather well-to-do Mr. Brown now invites Mr. Keats to stay with him on his half-side of the house, which he rents. Rather than complying with the many social obligations organized by Mr. Brown, however, Mr. Keats decides to spend Christmas with the Brawne family. While setting the table for the Christmas dinner, Fanny asks Mr. Keats, "I was wondering this morning, if you are sleeping in my bed?" Gently stroking a purring cat, Mr. Keats responds confusingly, "Pardon?" "You see, I believe you are", continues Fanny. She explains that as a child her family also lived in the same half-side of the house, which Mr. Brown now rents. The underlying double meaning is of course not lost to Mr. Keats. After dinner with only Samuel about, Mr. Keats holds Fanny's hand as they both gaze gently into each other's eyes. Outside, a beautiful snow covered tree with all its bare branches bathed in pale blue light stands boldly in the front yard. It is now winter, but love is alight.

Wanting to know more about poetry, Fanny goes to Mr. Keats to take a poetry lesson - to Mr. Brown's great consternation. Once the two are alone, Fanny asks the question, "Can you say something of the craft of poetry?" Slightly chagrined, Mr. Keats answers, "Poetic craft is a carcass, a shame. If it does not come naturally, like leaves to a tree, it better not come at all." Pressing him further, he explains, "A poem needs understanding through the senses. The point of diving into a lake is not immediately to swim to the shore, but to be in the lake, to luxuriate in the sensation of water. You do not work the lake out. It is an experience beyond thought. Poetry soothes and emboldens the soul to accept the mystery." Smiling quickly, Fanny answers, "I love mystery." But can their mysterious love grow as naturally as leaves to a tree? Asking her mother, whether Mr. Keats likes her, she answers in a quite matter-of-fact way, "Mr. Keats knows he cannot like you. He has no living and no income."

Mr. Brown on the other hand does have an income. When Mr. Brown sends Fanny a Valentine card, it is Mr. Keats who first feels literally left out in the rain. Yet, while Mr. Keats has no income of his own, Mr. Brown has no respect for Fanny. For Mr. Brown, Fanny Brawne is merely a tease or a cheap flirt. It becomes quickly evident that Mr. Brown sent the card purely in jest. Clearly, he is playing a game. For Mr. Keats, however, love is not a game. Nor is it some frivolous game for Fanny. After this dreadful incident provoked by Mr. Brown, the two need time to assess their feelings.

With the coming of spring, their relationship tenderly blossoms. It begins with the Brawne family moving into the other half of the same house, where Mr. Brown and Mr. Keats live. Fanny and Mr. Keats soon discover that their two bedrooms are divided merely by a thin wall. They are so close. And like a poem which needs understanding through the senses, Jane Campion's film now comes into full flower. The two are now frequently seen outside, playing in the garden filled with the humming of bees flying from flower to flower. While strolling together under the shade of some whispering trees, Mr. Keats tells Fanny, "I had such a dream last night... I was floating above the trees with my lips connected to those of a beautiful figure, for what seemed like an age... Flowery treetops sprung up beneath us and we rested on them with the lightness of a cloud." Finding a wonderful place, they sit down. Fanny asks, "Who was the figure?" Lying down, Mr. Keats answers, "I must have had my eyes closed because I can't remember." Smiling, Fanny responds, "And yet you remember the treetops." Looking tenderly at her, he answers, "Not so well as I remember the lips." Smiling candidly, Fanny continues, "Whose lips?...Were they my lips?" Their heads come slowly closer as they kiss. Marvellous moments ensue with the two now experiencing the wonderfully ordinary mysteries of love. Opening the windows one day to let in the fresh spring air, Fanny feels a tender breeze caress her skin as she lies on her bed. Another day Mr. Keats climbs a blossoming fruit tree so that he may rest upon its flowery crown, enjoying the warm sun on his skin.

The two are truly in love. But with love also comes heartache. With no money coming in and deep in debt, Mr. Keats must continue to write if he is to live. He therefore accepts Mr. Brown's invitation to travel with him to the Isle of Wight for the summer. There they can dedicate themselves undisturbed to their writing. Now Fanny and Mr. Keats have only their love and their letters to keep them together. Their heart-felt distance and yearning for each other are superbly described in their beautiful summery letters. When Mr. Keats eventually returns to live in Mr. Brown's half-side of the house, Fanny is overjoyed, but Fanny's mother, Mrs. Brawne (Kerry Fox) is extremely worried. How can Fanny "go to dances" - in other words meet other eligible bachelors - when Mr. Keats is living next door? As Mrs. Brawne's friend Maria Dilke (Claudie Blakley) precisely puts it, "Attachment is such a difficult thing to undo." Unperturbed by all their misgivings, the two become engaged - if only informally. Indeed, in one quiet intimate moment, as the two sit closely together hand in hand on the sofa in Mr. Brown's study room, Mr. Keats begins to recite verses from a new poem. One he has decided to dedicate to Fanny. Gazing into her eyes he recites, "**Bright Star!** would I were steadfast as thou art." Yet, the harsher winds of autumn are beginning to blow.

One day while returning home from London, Mr. Keats is caught in a terrible icy storm, making him dreadfully ill. Very frail and weak, his sickness is clearly life-threatening. Added to this, Mr. Brown now burdens Mr. Keats with his growing problems. Encumbered with debt and facing the coming costs of supporting his new family, Mr. Brown is compelled to ask Mr. Keats to move out. But where is he to go? Rallying to his side, Mr. Keats' friends consult his doctor, who suggests that he "move to a gentler climate" like Rome for his health. While his friends organize the funds for his trip, Mr. Keats lodges in a dark, damp and dreary bedsit, where his health quickly begins to fail, reviving memories of Tom's death. He is eventually taken in by the Brawne family, where Mrs. Brawne finally allows Fanny to officially become engaged to Mr. Keats. On the eve of his journey Mrs. Brawne takes Mr. Keats hand smilingly and says, "Come back.

Live with us. Marry our Fanny.” Later that evening, when they are alone, Mr. Keats cuts a lock of Fanny’s hair and tenderly puts it into a small envelope. Sadly he says, “We should say our goodbyes now.” With tears in their eyes, he tells Fanny, “We have woven a web, you and I. Attached to this world, but a separate world of our own invention. We must cut the threads Fanny.” Crying heavily, she stammers, “No. I can’t. I never will.” Next day, Fanny accompanies Mr. Keats to the coach. They part without a word.

Sad autumn leaves fall, as the dark days of winter draw near. One snowy day, Mr. Brown enters the drawing room where the Brawne family are all assembled around the fire. The words Fanny so fear are now uttered. Taking off his hat, he announces the death of Mr. Keats in far off Italy. Crushed, Fanny runs out of the room as Mr. Brown reads out an account of his death. We next see Fanny sitting in a gloomy room, stitching beside a window. There is a close up of her hand as she cuts a black thread and quietly lays down the scissors. Now attired in dark mourning-dress, we watch her as she cuts off her long hair. Her dark apparel contrasts sharply with the white snow as she goes outside. Now among the naked trees, she tenderly recites the poem **Bright Star**. And as if an echo from her beloved, we now hear the voice of Ben Wishaw (Keats), who too is reciting a poem - Ode to a Nightingale. Music accompanies his voice as the final credits cross the darkened screen. Words fill the dimly lit theatre while we sit and wonder “... Was it a vision or a waking dream?”

Questions:

bv: School is still one of the best places where you can meet up with other boys and girls. Mobile phones and internet also are important ways in which boys and girls can communicate and meet. Which medium do you prefer to use, when trying to meet up with someone? Which other meeting places offer a good location where to meet boys and girls?

How did young boys and girls meet and get to know each other in 1800? Was there public education at that time? Was there even such a thing as coeducation? At this time there were of course no telephones, cinemas or internet. Even the postal service was very limited. So how did young people meet?

Which romantic films or novels do you know? Do they always have a happy ending? Explain.

There are many films about “romantic love” (i.e. Pretty Woman, Verliebt etc.). Can you name a few? There are far fewer films about “tragic love” (i.e. Romeo and Juliet, Soul Kitchen). Can you name a few? How would you describe the difference between “romantic love” and “tragic love”? Which one do you consider more realistic?

av: In Bright Star, the abundance of colours plays an important role. Generally speaking, the film begins with rather dark grey colours. When does the exuberance of colour first become most apparent in the film (i.e. directly after the Valentine scene, when Fanny brings a flowery branch to Mr. Keats)? What does this represent? Is the accompanying music fast or slow? Why? When does the film shift to darker more morbid shades of colour (i.e. when Mr. Keats falls seriously ill after returning home from London)? What could this represent?

In the contentious Valentine sequence, Mr. Keats, Mr. Brown and Fanny are all outside on a cold wet early spring day. Each of them is very upset, but for different reasons. What are their reasons? At one moment Mr. Keats asks Fanny, if she is in love with Mr. Brown. Fanny, however, does not say a single word. This is very unusual. Why doesn’t she speak? There is only one other moment in the film, when Fanny does not say a word. Which scene is it (i.e. when Fanny accompanies Mr. Keats to the coach on his way to Italy)? What does being “wordless” mean in this scene?

Although Mrs. Brawne seems to like Mr. Keats, she becomes increasingly worried about Fanny’s growing relationship with him. Why? What are her motives? Is she a “bad” mother for feeling this way?

How was it decided with whom Mr. Keats should travel with to Italy? Why did Fanny not accompany him to Italy?

Jane Campion's film **Bright Star** is an amazingly beautiful and very sensual work. As such it has a number of distinguishing features. Firstly, although the film is based on the true-life encounter between Miss Fanny Brawne - a relatively unknown figure - and the now famous Romantic poet, John Keats, the story is always told from Fanny's perspective. It is her experiences of being in love with John Keats which are at the centre of the film. Poetic genius plays little role here. Indeed, even though Mr Keats wrote some of his best work while in Hampstead Heath, in the film we seldom see Mr. Keats put pen to paper. Rather than focusing on the creative process of writing poetry, the film tells the "simple" story of how two young people - Fanny Brawne and John Keats - fall in love. That is, it concentrates on the ordinary mystery of love.

Secondly, by presenting the story through Fanny's eyes, audiences are able to enter a world close to Campion's heart: namely, the world of women. While the men's world is clearly demarcated, most plainly in the room where the two men - Mr. Keats and Mr. Brown - do their writing activities, the camera goes on to reveal a whole new other network of intimate relationships more typical of the women's world of the Regency period. Indeed, outside of the two main male figures, Mr. Keats and Mr. Brown (Samuel Brawne plays too little a role here) all other interesting characters are played by women: Fanny Brawne, Mrs. Brawne (a single parent!), Toots, Mrs. Maria Dilke, and the Irish maid Abigail. In this way, Campion is able to depict the various roles played by women in early 19th century English society, without overly theorizing them or making them appear dry.

Thirdly, while the film **Bright Star** can be categorized as a period piece, it is certainly a very unusual one. Period films are often concerned with trying to impress audiences with an aesthetic recreation of a past age. This makes issues of authenticity enormously important. For Campion, however, the visual splendour exhibited in **Bright Star** is used solely to make the emotional intimacy between the two main characters, Fanny Brawne and John Keats, as real as possible. That is, Campion is looking for a poetic realism here, not a meticulous reconstruction of a bygone era.

Similarly, although Campion goes to great length to ensure each part is played in accordance with the habits, gestures and mannerisms of the time, all the characters - even the minor figures - continue to maintain a remarkable natural ease throughout the film. This freshness contrasts sharply with many other period films, where characters often become reduced to caricatures of antiquated mannerisms, acting out historical clichés.

Moreover, in **Bright Star** Campion very cleverly uses the rather restricted mannerisms of the day to further heighten the emotion tension between Fanny Brawne and John Keats as they try to overcome the hurdles of social custom. For when living in a world where contact between young men and women was highly regimented and receiving post was a rare affair, strolling through the park together, receiving a written letter from your beloved or simply sharing the same sofa as you recite poetry to each other suddenly acquires an enormous emotional intensity. In certain social circles of the Regency period, these few precious moments were all that young people had. This is easily forgotten in today's world of coeducation, teenage discos, texting and chat rooms.

Fourthly, throughout the film the dialogue is absolutely brilliant. When Fanny and John Keats have their conversations, they exude an elegance and subtlety rarely heard in cinemas. Indeed, even when they begin reciting verses back and forth to each other, this no way appears artificial or pretentious in the film, because the poetry they express is an expression of their love. Behind these words lie very real sensitive people. This is what the dialogue in Campion's screenplay makes us so wonderfully believe.

Questions:

bv: **What is a period film? Give some examples (i.e. Gladiator, Der Untergang, Gangs of New York). Why are these types of films popular?**

What kind of entertainment did people have 200 years ago? What would they do for fun in the evenings?

What kind of life did working women lead in Great Britain around 1800? Where were they employed? What kind of life did upper-class women lead? Although they did not work, which hobbies (i.e. stitching) or leisure pastimes (i.e. reading) did they enjoy?

av: **Although Bright Star tells the story of the two lovers Fanny Brawne and John Keats, in the film there is very little kissing and the bed scenes are by today's cinema and MTV standards rather mild. Why did Campion decide to shoot the film in this way? Does this make the film more compelling to you or less?**

How are the worlds of men and women demarcated in the film? Which world is presented in more detail throughout the film? Give examples of concrete characters to illustrate your point.

In Bright Star, all the characters speak in a way not typical of today's language. This may at times make the film difficult to fully understand. How would you describe the language in the film, and in particular of Fanny, Mr. Keats and Mr. Brown? Does their manner of speech appear artificial or befitting to their character? When Fanny and John Keats start reciting poetry to each other, is this disturbing to you? Explain.

Do Fanny Brawne and John Keats ultimately overcome the barriers set to their love by society? Could such a love affair exist today? Explain.

Analysis of a film sequence I

In the film **Bright Star**, there are so many extraordinary well scripted scenes it is very difficult to select just one for careful analysis. For example, there is the film sequence where Fanny and Mr. Keats are strolling alone through the park on a warm sunny spring day. We see them in a total-shot or full-shot: that is, from head to toe along with much of the background, so viewers gain an idea of where the scene is located. Then there is a half-shot from the waist upwards, showing the two from the front walking together. The half-shot means the camera has gotten closer to the protagonists. This makes the scene more intimate to viewers. We hear the rustling of the bulrush as the two walk quietly together - slightly apart - smiling and glimpsing at each other. The camera now returns to a full-shot, slowly following them as they enter a shadier more hidden corner of the park. Here, Mr. Keats starts telling Fanny about his curious dream. "I had such a dream last night... I was floating above the trees with my lips connected to those of a beautiful figure, for what seemed like an age... Flowery treetops sprung up beneath us and we rested on them with the lightness of a cloud." They find a quiet place to sit down as Fanny asks Mr. Keats, "Who is the figure?" The camera now cuts to a half-shot of the two sitting next to each other on the ground, thereby making the scene more intimate. The camera follows Mr. Keats as he lies down on his arm, making the scene even more private. He answers, "I must have had my eyes closed because I can't remember." Fanny now also lies down on her arm, making the scene very intimate. Smilingly, she says, "And yet you remember the treetops." Glancing tenderly towards her, he answers, "Not so well as I remember the lips." Continuing to smile, she now takes off her hat and candidly asks, "Whose lips?... Were they my lips?" Mr. Keats slowly raises his head towards Fanny as they tenderly kiss for the first time. After a few moments, the camera cuts to a slightly closer position, thereby further emphasizing the extreme intimacy of this scene. Like their kisses, we now begin to hear tender music. Toots calls out for Fanny, awaking the two as if from a dream. Now with the joy of love pounding in their hearts, the music also begins to become more exuberant. In a total-shot, we now see little Toots innocently playing with the two lovers under beautiful blooming trees as the wonderful music continues. Then there is a total-shot of Fanny's sun-lit bedroom. A gentle breeze moves the soft white curtain as Fanny, sitting on her bed, slowly lies down, letting the light wind tenderly touch her skin and rustle her dress, making this an extremely sensual moment in the film. The happy music continues, as we now see Mr. Keats, Mr. Brown and Samuel walking among blooming fruit trees. And like in his dream, we see Mr. Keats climbing up a flowery tree. With the camera now on a dolly (a movable crane) looking down, we see a total-shot of Mr. Keats as if floating on a canopy of blooming flowers. This is also a highly sensual moment in the film, as the music slowly ends. The timing, music and use of visual metaphors are absolutely superb in this sequence.

Questions:

bv: **We often arrange to meet someone, when we go shopping, to the cinema, to a park or a café. All these places, while very different, have one thing in common - they are partly public and partly private. Can you give other nice examples of such meeting places? Why is this public/private mix good, when trying to meet someone or do something together?**

What is a close-up shot? What is it used for? What is the opposite of a close-up shot (i.e. a long shot)? What could these shots be used for? There is of course a camera shot between these two extremes. Does anyone know what it is called (i.e. a half-shot or medium-shot)? What could this middle type of camera shot be used for?

av: The sequence begins with a very public scene. The scene where Fanny and John Keats first kiss, however, is a very private moment. How does Campion visually organize this transition?

After their first kisses, the two are of course very happy. How are their feelings visually expressed in the shots that follow?

What role does the music play in this film sequence?

The last shot is of Mr. Keats lying on the flowery crown of a fruit tree. Where does this notion of floating on flowery treetops first appear in the sequence? What is the meaning of this last shot?

Analysis of a film sequence II

Another key sequence is when Fanny first receives a letter from Mr. Keats during his summer stay on the Isle of Wight. This sequence is outstanding because it so wonderfully unites word with image. Longing for a letter, we see Fanny in a total-shot serving tea, when she hears the postman. Then we see her in a half-shot, as she hears the postman opening the front gate. We can guess her intimate thoughts. Paying the postman, soft tender music begins as she holds the letter to her breast while walking up the stairs. Next there is a half-shot of Fanny going to her sunny bedroom window, where she anxiously sits down, holding the opened letter in her hands. The music continues as we now hear Ben Wishaw's voice (Mr. Keats) from off the screen reading the letter, describing where he is. We then see a quick half-shot of Mr. Keats looking out the window. This is rapidly followed by a total-shot of Mr. Keats sitting at the window of his sunny room, next to his writing desk. His voice continues as we now see Fanny again, smiling while she eagerly continues to read the letter. Then there are two superimposed images. The first is a close-up of the letter. We can pick out a few words as we hear them spoken aloud. The second is a long-shot of Mr. Keats standing far away and alone on a pebbly beach. These two shots are very different. In a close-up, the camera is normally very close to the face of the protagonist, highlighting the intimacy of a scene. In a long-shot, the camera is placed far away from the protagonist, emphasizing the sense of distance, loneliness or yearning of the character. In this sense, a long-shot is the exact opposite of a close-up. Campion superimposes these two different shots because she wants to capture this emotional dualism.

There is then a rather sharp cut, with a total-shot of Fanny, Toots and Samuel walking down a leafy pathway. The total-shot helps viewers re-orientate to the new location. Ben Wishaw's voice continues to read out the letter. As the three enter a beautiful small field full of bright blue flowers, his voice says "I want a brighter word than bright...A fairer word than fair." As the other two play, we see Fanny sit down in the middle of the field. Then there is a half-shot of Fanny as she is sitting, reading her letter. The camera position is so very low it almost suggests the view of a butterfly. Then we hear the words, "I almost wish we were butterflies, and lived but three summer days...Three such days with you I could fill with more delight than fifty common years could ever contain." Fanny lies down as Toots comes to her. A quick total-shot of Samuel walking away emphasizes he is not part of this emotional moment. Then we return to the half-shot of Fanny and Toots. Smiling, Fanny kisses Toots, saying "I love you...I love you Toots". Then there is a quick cut back to Samuel, who in a total-shot is looking rather forlorn.

Then there is a close-up of Fanny kissing an empty sheet of paper in her bedroom. We hear the words, "...you must write immediately and do all you can to console me in it. Make it as rich as a draught of poppies to intoxicate me. Like the softest words...and kiss them...that I may at least touch my lips where yours have been." The music now quickens as we see a close-up of Fanny's hand reach for her quill-pen on her writing desk. Beside the inkwell is a glass jar with a butterfly inside. As the hand puts pen to paper, we now hear Abbie Cornish's voice (Fanny) read out her responding letter. This is followed by a total-shot through the open door of Fanny sitting at her desk in her bedroom. Next there is a close-up of her letter, where we can read the words "butterfly farm" as her voice continues, "I have begun a butterfly farm in our bedroom in honour of us." Then there is a cut to a total-shot. Here we see Samuel and Toots

with butterfly nets happily capturing butterflies in a sunny field as her voice continues, "Sammy and Toots are capturing them for me." The delightful music, voice and field full of butterflies make this a magical moment in the film.

While the music continues, there is now a sharp cut, with a total-shot of Fanny and Toots in their shady bedroom. The total-shot informs viewers of the new location, while the shady bedroom contrasts sharply with the bright sunny field outside. Fanny is lying on her on her bed, reading a letter. Now we hear Ben Wishaw's voice (Mr. Keats) again. His new letter begins with the words, "I have two luxuries to brood over in my walks- your loveliness and the hour of my death..." Lying on her side, away from Toots, we see a close-up of Fanny, reading her letter. As his voice continues, Fanny now also reads out the words simultaneously. When his voice finishes, Fanny quietly repeats the last few words. The music continues as there is a quick half-shot of Toots arranging some jars - one of which has a butterfly in it - on a bedroom shelf. Then there is a close-up of beautiful butterflies, some within a jar and some flying freely within the bedroom. This is followed by a wonderful half-shot of Toots holding butterflies in her hands.

The music now ends as there is a close-up of the bedroom door handle, with a beautiful violet butterfly settled upon it. The door opens. There is a half-shot of Mrs. Brawne entering the bedroom. She doesn't look pleased. Fully entranced by the butterflies, Fanny lies on her bed while Toots is sitting upright. Annoyed, Mrs. Brawne says, "There's no air!" and walks towards the closed window. But Toots quickly counters, "No mama. They love the heat! We're going to lose them!" Now at the window, there is a half-shot of Fanny, lying on her bed. She begins to read her letter aloud to her mother. As she continues, there is a quick half-shot of Mrs. Brawne fully exasperated with the butterflies, followed by a return to the half shot of Fanny on her bed. Then there is a half-shot from the side of Fanny lying on her bed as she finishes the letter. As she slowly sits up, there is a cut to a new half-shot of Fanny facing Mrs. Brawne, who is standing unseen beside the camera. As she talks to her mother about her passionate love, there is a quick half-shot of Toots playing with the butterflies and then a return to the half-shot of Fanny. Now we see a half-shot of Mrs. Brawne, who has become angry with the whole situation. She starts towards the door. A total-shot now shows all three in the bedroom. Walking quickly to the door, Fanny says, "Watch the butterfly" so the insect won't be stepped on. "Well, move it!" retorts Mrs. Brawne as she leaves the room. A quick half-shot of Toots still playing is followed by a quick half-shot of Fanny surrounded by numerous butterflies. The bedroom door slams shut.

There is now a sharp cut, where we see Toots coming down the stairs in a total-shot. The low camera moves back as Toots moves towards it. Next we see a half-shot of Mrs. Brawne and the Irish maid Abigail preparing some pastries in the kitchen. Then there a low half-shot of Toots walking forward, saying "Fanny wants a knife." The low angle is used of course, because Toots is a small girl. If the camera were set at the usual height, Toots would look small, emphasizing her childishness. By setting the half-shot at a low angle, Toots appears bigger, giving her more authority, adding seriousness to the scene. Now we see the half-shot of Abigail and Mrs. Brawne, who looks up and asks, "What for?" Back to the close half-shot of Toots, she answers, "To kill herself." Next we see a half-shot of Fanny crying on the floor beside an opened letter, while Mrs. Brawne enters the room. While the cat tries to catch a butterfly, Fanny says sobbingly, "It's all over...after all this time." Fanny continues as we see a close half-shot of Mrs. Brawne looking seriously on the bed. Her eyes look down as we now see a close-up of Fanny's cut wrist. Then there is a close-up of a butterfly slowly dying in a bedroom corner. As we hear Fanny's weeping, we now see a close-up of a brush and dustpan, sweeping up the dead butterflies. Finally we see a top-shot of Toots and Abigail walking down the stairs, taking all the empty glass jars away. The camera then fades into black. So ends this brilliant film sequence, where word and image are so carefully crafted together and butterflies become a metaphor for love.

Questions:

- bv: Red roses are often seen as a symbol of love. What other symbols do you know? Bees humming from flower to flower are also often used as a metaphor for love. What other metaphors could you imagine would be a good expression of your love for someone?**
- av: Do you think Campion's use of butterflies is an adequate metaphor for the love felt by Fanny and Mr. Keats? Why? What happens to the butterflies at the end of the sequence? When do we first come across the notion of butterflies in this sequence (i.e. from Keats letter)?**

When does the music begin to quicken in this sequence? Why? What does it express?

When Fanny is lying in the field of bright blue flowers, the position of the camera filming her is extremely low. Indeed, the camera lens is located between blades of grass and numerous flowers. Why? What perspective does this suggest (i.e. the camera - that is to say us the audience - is made to see and feel like a butterfly)?

Language

The speech and dialogue in the film **Bright Star** is of a very high level and quality. They also follow certain mannerisms typical of the Regency period. In short, this is not your usual Email or chat room level of English. While pupils should be told this, they should not let themselves be intimidated by this. The photography, music and acting are so superb that pupils will be generally able to follow each scene without fully understanding the complete dialogue.

Campion's film is named after a poem written by John Keats in 1819. Verses of the poem **Bright Star** are recited several times in the film, most notably at the end. For your convenience, the poem is presented in its full length below.

John Keats sonnet BRIGHT STAR from 1819

Bright Star! would I were steadfast as thou art-
Not in lone splendour hung aloft the night,
And watching, with eternal lids apart,
Like Nature's patient sleepless Eremite,
The moving waters at their priestlike task
Of pure ablution round earth's human shores,
Or gazing on the new soft fallen mask
Of snow upon the mountains and the moors-
No - yet still steadfast, still unchangeable,
Pillow'd upon my fair love's ripening breast,
To feel for ever its soft fall and swell,
Awake for ever in a sweet unrest,
Still, still to hear her tender-taken breath,
And so live ever - or else swoon to death.

In order to also help you follow some of the lovely dialogue in the film, here are a few excerpts.

1. When Fanny first meets Mr. Keats:

Keats: How would you describe me...my character?

Fanny: I am not the least interested in your character.

Mr. Brown (enters room): Men's room, out! Poets got to do a bit of writing.

Fanny (leaving): My stitching has more merit and admirers than your two scribblings put together...And I can make money from it!

2. When Fanny is with Mr. Keats during the poetry lesson:

Fanny: Can you say something of the craft of poetry?

Keats: Poetic craft is a carcass, a sham. If poetry does not come as naturally as leaves to a tree, then it better not come at all!

Fanny Brawne: I still don't know how to work out a poem.

John Keats: A poem needs understanding through the senses. The point of diving into a lake is not immediately to swim to the shore, but to be in the lake, to luxuriate in the sensation of water. You do not work the lake out, it is a experience beyond thought. Poetry soothes and emboldens the soul to accept the mystery.

Fanny Brawne: I love mystery.

3. When Fanny and Mr. Keats are strolling alone in the park:

John Keats: I had such a dream last night. I was floating above the trees with my lips connected to those of a beautiful figure, for what seemed like an age. Flowery treetops sprung up beneath us and we rested on them with the lightness of a cloud.

Fanny Brawne: Who was the figure?

John Keats: I must have had my eyes closed because I can't remember.

Fanny Brawne: And yet you remember the treetops.

John Keats: Not so well as I remember the lips.

Fanny Brawne: Whose lips? Were they my lips? (and they slowly kiss).

4. When Mr. Keats is saying his final good-byes to Fanny on the eve of his trip:

Fanny: Shall we awake...and find all this is a dream? There must be another life. We can't be created for this kind of suffering.

Keats: We have woven a web, you and I, attached to this world, but a separate world of our own invention. We must cut the threads, Fanny.

Fanny: No. I can't. I never will.

BRIGHT STAR

Großbritannien/Frankreich/USA/Australien 2009 Jane Campion

Director: Jane Campion

FSK: 6, recommended age: 16+

English with German subtitles

Themes: the romantic poets, literature, art, Victorian society, the individual, gender, women's role, love, enthusiasm, marriage

Study Guide by Julian Name, 2010

WAS IST BRITFILMS?

BRITFILMS ist eine Schulfilmreihe der AG Kino-Gilde, Verband der Programmkinos und Filmkunsttheater in Deutschland. Sechs englischsprachige Filme touren 16 Monate lang durch die deutschen Kinos und werden von den Kinobetreibern in Schulvorführungen für Kinder im Alter von 8-18 Jahren eingesetzt. Die Vorführungen können direkt in den teilnehmenden Kinos gebucht werden.

Begleitend werden Fortbildungen/Filmreviews für Englischlehrer und -lehrerinnen angeboten. Ebenso gibt es als pädagogisches Begleitmaterial englischsprachige Study Guides zu allen Filmen als Download. Das Ziel von BRITFILMS ist der Aufbau eines Netzwerks aus Filmtheatern, Verbänden und Schulen, dass sich kontinuierlich für die Vermittlung von englischer Filmkultur in Deutschland einsetzt. Informationen zu allen Filmen, Termine der Fortbildungsveranstaltungen, englischsprachige Study Guides und Tournéedaten unter: www.britfilms.de



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BRITISH SCHOOLS FILM FESTIVAL #4

WORK SHEET FOR THE FILM **BRIGHT STAR** BY JANE CAMPION

1. Comparison of **BRIGHT STAR** with other films

In class generally discuss the film, letting people freely make comparisons with other films they know. These could be period films, love stories or tragedies. Draw out the differences and similarities between these films and **Bright Star**, writing the information on the board. What do these differences and similarities tell us about the film **Bright Star**?

2. Characterisation

Working now in groups, please identify and describe in your own words all the main characters in the film. These of course include Fanny Brawne, Mr. Keats, Mr. Brown, Mrs. Brawne, Toots, Abigail and perhaps Samuel. After writing everything down, discuss all points in class. What aspects do you find the most interesting and surprising about the main characters?

3. Comparison of scenes I

Work as a small group. Fold a page from top to bottom. Watch the opening sequence of **Bright Star**. Here we see a young woman stitching next to a window bathed in beautiful natural white light. There are a few close-up shots of the woman's hand threading a needle and stitching white material. Write down key words describing the details and mood of the sequence. Towards the very end of the film, there is a very similar sequence. Watch it carefully. Here we see Fanny is now sitting in a rather dark room. Again there are a few close-up shots of her hand, but now she is cutting a black thread. Write down key words describing the details and mood of the sequence. Compare and contrast the two sequences. Why are these sequences put at the beginning and at the end of the film? Discuss points in class.

4. Comparison of scenes II

Work as a small group with the same folded paper. Another example of two similar sequences is when the bedrooms of both Fanny and Mr. Keats are divided by a wall. Watch the first sequence carefully. Here we see Mr. Keats hearing Fanny's movement on the other side of the wall. The room is brightly lit. Mr. Keats tenderly knocks on the wall. On the other side of the wall are Fanny and Toots in their bright bedroom. Hearing him, Fanny returns his knocks. Mr. Keats responds by moving his bed to the wall. Write down key words describing the details and mood of this sequence. Now watch the next sequence, where Mr. Keats is lying ill in a very dark room. This time Fanny, with a very worried face, moves her bed to the wall. Write down key words describing the details and mood of the sequence. Compare and contrast the two sequences. The first sequence is happy and expectant. The second is sad, and appears final. Discuss points in class.

5. Research and discussion

Allow pupils time to do research (i.e. via internet etc.) on John Keats and his relationship to Fanny Brawne. A useful place to start is on "Letters of John Keats to Fanny Brawne", which has about 39 letters available online. Each group should choose one letter, analysing its language, translating it into our current form of speech. Once this is done, the letters can be read aloud in class. Finally, there can be a discussion about whether these forms of communication (i.e. very intensive letter writing, reciting poetry) are now possible today. More importantly, it raises the question whether such a love as between Fanny and John Keats could exist today. That is, whether it is universal or specific to the time.