

Films of 1966



Rules: Oscar nominees in major categories were watched. BAFTA and Golden Globes nominees were usually watched as well. A 1966 US release was usually stuck to concerning eligibility. A few foreign language films were included, but only stand outs as well as available spaghetti westerns. Given that in 1966, the Hays Production Code was starting to be challenged more and more, how many liberties the film took will factor in.

Tier 10: The Bad

54. **The Bible: In the Beginning:** A three hour bore. Some of the cinematography is nice and the sets involving Noah's arc are nice. Yet it takes three hours to tell the first 20-or-so chapters of the book of genesis. And worst of all, it is almost a straight-forward depiction. There is essentially no character development; only filming what was in the bible. George C. Scott plays Abraham, but is given nothing to do. Peter O'Toole plays an angel, but is given nothing to do. John Huston (also the director) plays Noah, and at least imparts the character with a king of whimsy; making that segment of the film tolerable.

Tier 9: The Ugly

53. **Fireball 500:** It isn't so much that this film is flat out bad, but rather there is no need for it to exist. The film is a spin-off of the once-popular and now-waning Beach Party film genre; now with auto racing (and moonshine)! Even at 90 minutes, the runtime is heavily padded with b-roll of generic auto racing, footage of actual NASCAR events, and stunt work of cars crashing. The plot is equally pointless and serves as a way for Frankie Avalon to look good and sing songs. Julie Parrish was good, and I wished she had more of a film career as she showed some potential.
52. **What's Up, Tiger Lily:** Written by Woody Allen, this film is considered his first feature. The film itself is a dubbing (and re-cutting) of a Japanese Bond film. The script was rather meh; the laughs were not consistent. The voice acting could have been a lot better, the voices were not distinct enough at times. Although the general idea of dubbing for comedic effect can work wonders (*Yu-gi-oh: The Abridged Series*), it mainly falls flat here.
51. **The Wild Angels:** One of the first outlaw biker (and counterculture) films, it stars Peter Fonda. One of the biggest issues is that even with a 90-minute runtime, a fair chunk of the film is showing the

bikers partying (removing these scenes would probably cut out ten or more minutes). The other issue is that prominent display of Nazi flags and symbols, takes on a new (or potentially still the same) meaning—in the 60s maybe these were truly just a way of sticking it to the man, but now... not so much. The highlight of the film occurs near the end (but not at the end; because so much of the film is pure padding) when Peter Fonda's character give a eulogy. That is a good scene. But it can't save the film.

50. **Boy, Did I Get A Wrong Number:** The film is a complete miss, which is rather surprising. Bob Hope and Phyllis Diller are in the film, and are funny people, yet the film is not funny. The lines seems like they should be funny, but they fall flat. I can't tell if it is because Hope and Diller's character, have no characterization or the script itself is unfunny.

Tier 8: The Misses

49. **Ghost in the Invisible Bikini:** The second and final 'Beach Party' film on the list (and also the last pure film of the genre). The film is not very good. In fact, the title comes from a character added *after initial production* as the producer felt the film was missing something (that something ended up being his wife as a ghost sporting an invisible bikini). One benefit of the added scenes is that Boris Karloff (*Frankenstein*) and Karloff is always a treasure. Otherwise the film is straight out of a Scooby-Doo episode (note Scooby did not start airing until three years later); a lawyer (played by Basil Rathbone!) trying to kill heirs so he keeps the entire inheritance, with secret passages and ne'er-do-wellers dressed up as monsters; perhaps that is why I enjoyed it more than necessary.
48. **Hawaii:** A three-hour epic about a Calvinist missionary's life in Hawaii, set in the 1820s. Besides the runtime, the issue is that the film is more of a disjoint collection of events, rather than a coherent narrative. The film attempts to cover too much time and events—today it would have been a prestige miniseries; the cast includes Julie Andrews, Max von Sydow (*The Seventh Seal*), Richard Harris, and a young Gene Hackman. Yet, these actors are not allowed to shine, Julie Andrews's character in particular is given little. The film attempts to bring it together at the end, and almost does (in part because von Sydow is a great actor), yet after three hours, the audience can not care, partially because the film laid on the overly-religious characterization too heavy at the start.
47. **The Appaloosa:** The revenge western feature a now-reformed Marlon Brando out to get back his stolen horse. Brando is, to put it nicely, not good. He mumbles, and often veers into a bad, Speedy Gonzalez-esque, accent. The film also features John Saxon (a white man) as a cartoon villain Mexican gangster. The direction of the film is rather odd as well; there are multiple extreme close ups that are odd and do not fit in with the flow of the film.
46. **Made in USA:** The costumes are great and colorful. That is the end of the high note of the film. The rest of the film is a laundry list of every lazy criticism ever aimed at French New Wave films; except the criticisms are all spot on here. Even though the mystery-crime genre often have convoluted and minimal plots, this film decides that a plot is not really needed at all. The film spends lengthy tangents with pseudo-intellectual discussions of philosophy and politics (the never-ending political speeches quickly grow tiresome). There are 'high-brow' critiques of consumerism, "Disney with blood!" The film is a miss by Jean-Luc Godard.
45. **The Trouble with Angels:** The film is a major miss (even if directed by Ida Lupino). The film is about a trouble-making girl at an all-girls Catholic school. Yet the film repeats the steps of girl gets idea, girl manufactures mischief, girl gets in trouble via the stern head master. This sequence repeats for over an hour. Only in the last thirty minutes (of a nearly two-hour film).

44. **The Rare Breed:** A western that was dated the day it came out; lots of film on sound stages (winter sequences, a small town, part of a train sequence, and a few examples of rear projection instead of on-location added in the middle of the on-location scenes). The film looks old compared to all the other westerns on this list. The cast is good, led by Jimmy Stewart and Maureen O'Hara (Brian Keith is good in a comedic supporting role). Yet, most of the film is not needed (the first third exists to set up the rest of the movie, and isn't really needed). Though you forgive some of it, because of Jimmy Stewart.
43. **Navajo Joe:** Burt Reynolds play the titular Joe, who is (half) Navajo. Burt Reynolds is not (half) Navajo. Lots of people die, but the violence isn't as graphic (except for the end) as other films on the list. The film lacks much character development, and unlike other spaghetti westerns, there isn't a aura of mystery around the main character.
42. **One Million Years B.C.:** One of the most well-known films on the list, due to Raquel Welch's fur bikini. Though the real star of the film is the effects by Ray Harryhausen. He used stop-motion to animate the various dinosaur attacks (humans living alongside dinosaurs still rank low on the list of problems with the film). There isn't much of a plot, the dialogue is a collection of caveman grunts, and the characters are paper thin. What the film boils down to is the greatness of the stop-motion vs all the other bad stuff. Multiple sequences still look great (though yes, a tad dated); a shelter collapsing and dinosaurs capturing humans are two of the stand outs. One item worth noting is that this was a British production, meaning it did not have to adhere to the Production Code. The US release was cut by nine minutes to remove some sequences; those sequences for 1966 were good.

Tier 7: Tolerable to Decent Films You Wish Were Better (and Batman)

41. **Is Paris Burning?:** The second-worst part of the film is the runtime; almost three hours. A shorter film gets it ranked (slightly) higher. The main issue with the film is that is more of a fictionalized documentary of the liberation of Paris. Characters are not developed. When characters are developed, it is so when they are killed ten minutes later the death stirs up emotions in the audience. It is a cheap, pathetic, and overused gimmick. It also does not help that the film acts more as a symbol of national pride than a film (think of your favorite not-bad-but-not-good US War Film). Also as much as the film tries to be a tribute to the city of Paris itself, the city never becomes a character; rather multiple locations are used but with little effect.
40. **The Property is Condemned:** This film could easily rank lower. The second half is bad; the film is based on a one-act Tennessee Williams play (and it obvious they ran out of material and deviated too far from the play). The reason the film is watchable is that Natalie Wood (*West Side Story*) is amazing in her role. Robert Redford is also good. You put to great actors together and have their characters fall in love, the film will always have a hard floor. Yet sadly, this film is close to that floor.
39. **Our Man Flint:** An early James Bond parody that often doesn't land. The film simply is not that funny (it has some funny parts). One reason could be that the only four Bond films had been made before *Flint*, there was simply less material to parody. As it did have the remote island, the Bond girls, the gadgets, and 007 references. The real lasting impact is the influence on *Austin Powers*; the phone ringing and drilling into the earth. For Bond fans it is worth the watch.
38. **Torn Curtain:** Directed by Alfred Hitchcock and it is a miss. The film is attempted spy thriller, that is hampered by a poor script and Hitchcock living in the past. The plot starts off fine, but about a third of the way through it becomes a series of vignettes with cooky supporting characters. Rather than focus on the meeting of scientific minds and trying to suss out knowledge surrounding the physics of weapons. Instead the film rushes 'chase' sequences and 'narrow' escapes. Of particular note is the pathetic sound stage hill. How Hitchcock did not film that scene outdoors is crazy.

37. **Fahrenheit 451:** There is a fundamental difficulty in adapting the novel into a film. Yes the novel is about authoritarianism. However, the novel is – at the end of the day – a celebration of books. Using film to convey a love of books simply does not work well (part of the plot even shames people for being glued to their TVs!). Although the film is directed by François Truffaut (*The 400 Blows*), he does not speak English. The film is in English. The language barrier made it difficult to get good performances out of the actors (most seem flat, though Julie Christie is good). The set design is an awkward mix of futuristic (the monorail), contemporary (the furniture) and antique (the phones). Although it serves to distort the time of the events, it does not work.
36. **Khartoum:** The film starts with a nicely done battle scene (and some wonderful shots of the African desert). However the film becomes hard to take seriously after Lawrence Olivier appears – in black face – as a Muslim warlord. Olivier’s performance is simply cringe inducing (he is not a bad actor, but he should not be in black face saying, ‘Muhammad praise be upon him’). The other issue that the themes of the film never come through, it is simply a dull film, with nice action sequences and landscapes.
35. **The Chase:** The main issue with the film is that what was (most likely) progressive and shocking in 1966 screams dated today. The interactions of white characters and black characters comes across as well-meaning, but now cringe (we are going to throw a black man in jail to protect him from white people!). There is a (female) character, whose entire character is getting progressively more intoxicated and shrieking, ‘My husband is cheating on me!’ throughout the film. The cast is good, with Marlon Brando in the lead role, Jane Fonda and Robert Redford have supporting roles. Yet, the entire film feels dated. There was a good movie here, but it was not what ended up on celluloid.
34. **Gambit:** The primary issue with the film, is that it is essentially a worse version of another film on the list (*How to Steal a Million*). Both films are about stealing a priceless work of art among an unlikely couple (who, obviously, start to develop feelings for each other), even down to the sculptures being protected by a laser-activated security system. Here the leads are played by Michael Caine and Shirley MacLaine (vs Peter O’Toole and Audrey Hepburn). Nothing against Caine and MacLaine, they are both good actors, yet they are among the all-time greats. There is one main joke that quickly gets old, but is a solid joke.
33. **Batman:** The film is pure campy fun; everything is simply absurd. Some days you just can’t get rid of a bomb! Not much else needs to be said about the film. Enjoy the fun.

Tier 6: Good-Enough Films You Wish Were Better

32. **Walk, Don’t Run:** The final film for Cary Grant, and the film still feels like a relic from the Golden Age of Hollywood. The plot rehashes traditional story lines about men and women sharing apartments(!) and the importance of being engaged. Yet, Cary Grant is charming as ever so most of it works. Samantha Eggar is rather good, though one wishes they developed her character more.
31. **Ride in the Whirlwind:** One of two minimalist westerns directed by Monte Hellman, that were co-produced by and starring Jack Nicholson. This film is decent but pales in comparison to their first film (*Ride* was filmed right after *The Shooting*). One wishes they did more with Millie Perkins character (she was also in *The Shooting*, and much better in that). However, the film does have a modern feel. That being said, anytime a film is about the wrongly accused and vigilante justice, one can’t help but think of *The Ox-Bow Incident*, and this film is no *Ox-Bow*.
30. **The Big Gundown:** A spaghetti western starring Lee Van Cleef (the film should be watched in English). The film does take a while to really get going (it is a basic manhunt plot), and even at 95 minutes there are still sequences that do not add much to the film. Yet, the film comes together

nicely in the last third. The cinematography is good, but not great. It is a better, but not quite an essential part of the genre.

29. **Grand Prix:** I didn't think a racing film needed an overture, intermission, and an entr'acte – composed by Maurice Jarre (*Lawrence of Arabia*) – but the score was lovely. The film is rather long at almost three hours. The racing sequences are amazing and look like they could have been filmed today. These sequences are the best part of the film. The sound is also rich and deep; the engines roar. Yet the plot and characters do not matter, there is no drama (even if the cast is rather good). Take the film for what it is, a fun racing movie that is expertly made.
28. **Fantastic Voyage:** A well-made science-fiction film that has been parodied and paid homage multiple times. People are shrunk down to go inside the human body! The film has the hallmarks of 60s sci-fi; Cold War, needlessly complex science, lasers, etc. The lengthy opening sequence without much dialogue is nice. The camera work throughout the film is good. The sets are well done, though some of the effects look rather dated. The main complaint is the plot isn't really there; it is a collection of random events happening to the shrunk crew. Jean Val J'Al (*Casablanca*) was rather good as one of the doctors/scientists.
27. **You're a Big Boy Now:** Written and directed by Francis Ford Coppola in his second directorial film (he also co-wrote two other films on this list: *Is Paris Burning?* and *This Property is Condemned*). The strength of the film is Elizabeth Hartman who outclasses everyone else in the film. Geraldine Page received an Oscar nomination, somehow, as she overacted. Part of the issue with the film is the script, as it is too on-the-nose at times. The glimpses of talent are there for Coppola, but the film has its flaws.
26. **Arabesque:** The film stars Gregory Peck and Sophia Loren. Gregory Peck is great as a charming college professor who forced into international espionage. Peck's charm is needed as he isn't a great pairing with Sophia Loren. The main issue with the film is that it attempts too many plot twists and rug pulls. These forced plot twists replace character development and make the film ten-to-fifteen minutes too long. Also, some of the 'action' scenes veer into bad James Bond territory.
25. **Eye of the Devil:** An early surreal horror film. Though, by being an early film in the genre, it often over explains (instead of leaving items mysterious). The film makes sure the viewer has a good idea of what is going on, with there being too much exposition. Yet, by 1966 standards it is well-made, and new. One could easily trace the lineage from this film to more modern horror films, such as *Hereditary*. The film is also noteworthy for being the debut of Sharon Tate.
24. **The Sand Pebbles:** An interesting example of a film that ages poorly (and not entirely because of the frequent use of racial slurs to refer to the Chinese characters). Although the film is set in 1920s China, the parallels to the US involvement in Vietnam are easy to draw. Yet the Chinese revolutionaries are portrayed as liars, rapists, murderers, and torturers. The film shows a 'wedding' between a white man and a Chinese woman; yet the wedding is a Chinese ceremony and the film makes it very clear the woman is a virgin. There is also a forced romance subplot (the subplot itself is not bad, but it is not needed; the film runs three hours).

Tier 5: A Hodgepodge of Well-Made (and Influential) Films

23. **Born Free:** The film is pure fun. About a real-life couple who raised a wild lion in Africa. Who doesn't want a lion as a pet? Virginia McKenna helps hold the film together with excellent narration, and her performance gets complete audience buy-in that they should be invested in the life of their 'pet' lion.

22. **The Naked Prey:** The film score is great (essentially all African drums), and features multiple shots of the African wilderness. This film is classic of the survivalist genre; the film is a white man running from natives (the plot veers between cringe and respectful; one minute the natives are torturing the Europeans – who are made out to be bad guys; the Europeans not paying a small tribute to hunt on the land starts the conflict, and the Europeans over hunt) – and the next the natives are showing the knowledge of the landscape and mourning the loss of fallen soldiers). The dialogue is minimal and the film is the act of surviving; finding food, water, continually escaping the natives. You can't help but see the influence on more modern survival films; that is the strength of this film. It helped set the standard for modern (minimalist) survivalist films.
21. **Massacre Time (Le colt cantarono la morte e fu...tempo di massacro):** A spaghetti western, that could easily rank higher. The reason it is ranked here is that it leans a little too hard into cheesy western tropes (e.g., an over-the-top saloon brawl, a make-em-dance shooting sequence, and nearly-unlimited ammo). Some of the violence is gratuitous, but it is a spaghetti western, so this is a good thing. Also bullet holes are sorta shown on bodies, rather than a small spot of blood. Franco Nero stars as the lead and does his best Clint Eastwood impression (it can't be understated the influence Eastwood's *Dollars* character had on the genre). What allows the film to excel is the cinematography and directing. Yes the outdoors shots look nice, but there are multiple well-framed shots. Director Lucio Fulci uses the windows to frame shots, and move seamlessly from action outside building to inside. One particularly excellent sequence involves a character proving they did not fire a deadly shot—emptying his revolver bullet-by-bullet; all the audience sees is each bullet added to the ground with the sound of the revolver clicking.
20. **The Russians are Coming, the Russians are Coming:** The film boasts an all-star cast: Carl Reiner, Eva Marie Saint, Alan Arkin, among other great character actors of the time. The film is funny, but you wished it had more laughs (there are a few too many slow moments). It also helps being a good-enough satire of the Cold War, as a Russian sub has accidentally ran aground off a small New England island. The film avoids Russian (accent) stereotypes and portrays the Russians as real people; this is part of the film's charm, but admittedly the charm is not as important in a post-Cold War world.
19. **Cul-de-sac:** Co-written and directed by Roman Polanski. The black-and-white cinematography by Gilbert Taylor is rather good, with a few impressive shots (one of the better shots is the camera moving through a window). The plot is good, but the theme of masculinity is not very subtle. Donald Pleasence and Lionel Stander are good. The film is also adept and sneaking in humorous moments into a deadly serious plot.
18. **The Professionals:** A well-made western. The cinematography is rather good. The film was primarily shot on location in Death Valley, and the landscape shots are well done. The film succeeds in part due to a good cast: Burt Lancaster, Lee Marvin, and Jack Palance (among others). The film features an African-American character (an improvement for the era, even if the character is the least developed of the bunch). The film portrays the moral gray area of the characters well (though by today's terms it is not nearly as complex), and is too-on-the-nose at times with brief discussions about who actually are the good guys.
17. **Django:** One of the most iconic spaghetti westerns for a reason. The opening credits are great (and the theme song is a delight). The film features the over-the-top violence that (partially) makes the genre. Much of the film was a happy accident; storms caused the filming location to be a puddle of mud. This gave the ghost town an eerie feeling. The cinematography is not as good as others in the genre, though still good. Franco Nero is good as the titular Django (again an Eastwood-character copycat). Unfortunately, getting into more details risks spoilers. Of note is that the Italian-language version is far superior to the dubbed version.

16. **How to Steal a Million:** Audrey Hepburn is a delight as always. Peter O'Toole is a perfectly matched love interest for Hepburn. Hepburn's outfits were designed by Givenchy and they are wonderful (and were used to set up a joke in the film). The film is directed by William Wyler. The plot exists more as a reason to put Hepburn and O'Toole in comedic and romantic situations. There are no real flaws, but nothing sticks out as excellent—other than Hepburn and O'Toole.
15. **A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Forum:** An adaptation of the stage musical comedy, the film is fun. There are multiple good jokes, and the songs are good. The cast is enjoyable: Zero Mostel, Phil Silvers, and Jack Gilford are all hilarious. Of special note is that it is Buster Keaton's (*The General*) last film, and Buster is great in his small role (that is reminiscent of his silent comedies). A chaotic chase sequence near the end of the film, undoes some of the enjoyment; as it is an extensive miss. Yet, as a whole, the film is funny and enjoyable.

Tier 4: The Good

14. **A Man for All Seasons:** One has to imagine that winning Best Picture was the best thing to happen to the film's legacy. The film is not bad, but it is nothing special. The landscape shots are good, but not great, and there are some well-framed shots (won Best Color Cinematography). The script was good, not great (won Best Adapted Screenplay). The costumes are nothing to write home about (won Best Costumes). Paul Scofield is rather good as the lead Sir Thomas More (won Best Actor). The film is a little too long, even at two hours.
13. **7 Women:** The last feature film directed by John Ford. Ford's directing isn't particularly noteworthy (partially because the film was shot on a sound stage; you can tell it is not on location, but it is not glaringly bad). The strength is the plot and the performance of Anne Bancroft. The film, at its core, is about morality and faux-morality of overly-religious individuals. Bancroft is the chain-smoking, whisky-drinking cussing woman who is sent to be the doctor at a christian mission in China. Anything else risks being a spoiler for a great final act.
12. **The Group:** Before getting into the goods, it is worth mentioning that this film has flaws. It is two-and-a-half hours. It is a tad too sprawling; the plot is about eight woman who graduated a Vassar-like college in the mid-1930s. The film is probably improved by limiting the scope to a group a five or six. Due to the size of the cast character development often occurs via plot-driven elements, which depending on your view is bad or good. As most every plot-driven occurrence is a form of 'Men Suck' or that woman are more burdened with family care, it makes sense; the changes in these woman's lives are out of their control. Jessica Walter (*Arrested Development*) overacts at times, yet as the film progresses there is a reason for it. The rest of the cast is whos-who of actresses: Candice Bergen, Joan Hackett (who skillfully get the going after the opening sequence), Elizabeth Hartman (who's character was an economics major!), Shirley Knight, and Joanna Pettet. It is directed Sidney Lumet (*12 Angry Men*), who handles the (progressive themes) of the film wonderfully. *The Group* isn't perfect, but it is good. I won't say anything more at the risk of spoiling the finish.
11. **The Shooting:** One of the few times I've bent the criteria rules. The film was shown at film festival in 1966, but due to legal troubles and the like, it was not released until 1971. Given the earth-shattering shift in America Cinema over those five years, it is included here. The film is an excellent and minimalist western (also you could be convinced the film was made today). There are essentially four characters total (one of whom is a young Jack Nicholson) who are wandering through the desert. What they are searching for is often fuzzy, as the impetus for the trek is a nameless woman who has hired two miners to take her to a distant town. The film is well-shot and character-driven. With a sub-90 minute runtime, the film has not fat, and is able to keep the proper level of mystery. Only at the end, does everything come together, and it does so spectacularly.

10. **Morgan – A Suitable Case for Treatment:** Vanessa Redgrave was nominated for Best Actress and justifiably so. Vanessa Redgrave holds the film together as Leonie Delt. Leonie is a wealthy woman seeking a divorce from her crazy (and communist) husband Morgan (played by David Warner). Morgan's action quickly venture into cringe, and yet Redgrave is able to play the role of the concerned-and-yet-still-sorta-in-love ex-wife. Redgrave prevents the film from veering fulling into ditch the stalker, because Redgrave imparts her character with just-enough crazy and aloofness as well. The film goes a little too off the rails near the end and some of the comedy bits do not land; hampering the overall effect. The film was nominated for Best Costumes (Black and White) and deservedly so. What remains is a rather funny, and well-crafted (rom) com.

Tier 3: The Best Mainstream-ish Films of the Year

9. **Blowup:** A film that is difficult to rank. The film is directed by Michelangelo Antonioni (in his English-language debut). The plot revolves around a fashion photographer potentially having captured a murder with his camera—or at least he thinks he has. From that, now-standard plots about what is real, what is imagined quickly develop; it is because we've become accustomed to this as a plot device it does not seem as novel as it was in 1966. The main issue with the film is pacing. The film is slow, and sequences are dragged out. Multiple shots are well-framed and the direction is top notch. It comes down to if the themes land or if the film is a slog.
8. **The Fortune Cookie:** Directed and co-written by Billy Wilder (*Some Like It Hot* and *The Apartment*) the film is rather good, albeit a tad too long. The strength of the film is not the performances of Walter Matthau or Jack Lemmon (though Matthau is great as a sleazy-yet-intelligent lawyer). Instead the heart of the film is Lemmon's character's relationship with the football player (of the Cleveland Browns) that 'injured' him. The film is about (inter-racial) male friendship and mental health. However the film spends too much time developing other characters (ex-wife, private eye investigating the insurance claim). The film has multiple witty lines (like all Wilder comedies).
7. **Alfie:** Michael Caine absolutely carries the film. This is not to say the other actors are not good, but the the film rests on Alfie (played by Caine) being contemptible but also lovable. Caine manages to play the part perfectly. The breaking of the fourth wall is hit-or-miss. In many ways this film is hard to rank; Alfie is young and a serial philanderer who eventually comes to see the wrongness in his ways. This is a type of film that has been made over and over, yet *Alfie's* portrayal of the Swinging 60s (it is part of the Swinging London subgenre of film, of which there are multiple on this list). Yet, this version was one of the first to do it properly. It isn't quite as realistic or gritty as some as the other Swinging London films for most of its runtime, but the final twenty minutes are a whopper.

Tier 2: (Cult) Classics and Must Watches

6. **Georgy Girl:** Lynn Redgrave is great as the titular Georgy. The film is a tad heavy-handed with Georgy being frumpy and there unattractive and unpopular. Redgrave is great in every aspect of the character; daughter, friend, lover, mistress, care-giver. The cast is rounded out wonderfully with James Mason (*A Star in Born (1954)*), a young Charlotte Rampling, and Alan Bates. Every cast member is funny. And although the story has been mostly told before; man slowly falls for the 'unattractive' but kind friend, the film brought so much new to the genre. Affairs and abortions are commonplace; in many ways *Georgy Girl* could be an independent film from today. Also the constant grittiness and realism help to distinguish *Georgy* from other Swinging London films of the year.
5. **Seconds:** A beautiful science-fiction (horror?) film. It was directed by John Frankenheimer (*Grand Prix*), who showed off his range in his two films in 1966. The cinematography by James Wong Howe is amazing; the deep focus, the distorted views, the framing, the use of mirrors, the crisp black and

white, as well as early work that mimics a modern steadicam. Rock Hudson plays against type and is great in the role. The film is a delight, and an excellent film on identity and life; filled with hidden gems.

Tier 1: Masterpieces of Cinema

4. **Persona:** Written and directed by Ingmar Bergman, the film is a masterpiece. However, do not ask me what the film is about. The film has an unending list of potential interpretations; all of which can be justified. The film has the hallmarks of Bergman's visual feel; great lighting, beautiful black and white, amazing landscapes, etc. The film is beautiful to look at, and includes some amazing effects. Both Bibi Andersson and Liv Ullmann are amazing in the film. Ullmann's character is essentially mute, and she is still able to convey a wide range of emotions and avoids being overshadowed by Andersson's equally amazing performance.
3. **The Battle of Algiers:** This is one of the greatest films of all time. It is required watching for understanding the War on Terror, and yes it was made in 1966. The film is a newsreel-style (but fictionalized) portrayal of the French occupation of (Islamic) Algeria. The film smartly builds some sympathy for the native insurgents (it starts with the French torturing an insurgent), but makes sure to show that there are no good guys here. Each side is violent. Every lesson that we learned from Afghanistan and Iraq was here, on film, 35 years before 9/11. Except for deterioration of the black and white film (it is very grainy), you wouldn't be able to tell this wasn't made today. The camera work gives a feeling to intimate voyeurism; that the audience is there, in Algeria, watching these events unfold. It is possibly the best film on colonialism, insurgency, and terror.
2. **The Good, The Bad, and The Ugly:** Easily the greatest spaghetti western, possibly the greatest western, and in a certain light, the greatest film of all time. Let's get the bad out of the way: the film does contain a few western flourishes; shooting off hats and shooting through ropes. Also the English is dubbed over (even for English-speaking actors) resulting in the dialogue being out of sync. But that is it. Those are the only two complaints. The film has an easily top-five score (composed by Ennio Morricone). One of the more impressive functions of the score is that almost nothing happens in the first hour of the film other than character introductions. The gist of the plot does not start until almost the one-third point (it is an almost three hour film), and yet the first hour is exciting. The score also ensures the dialogue-less climax works. The score does a lot of heavy lifting, and is up to the task. The framing of shots is gorgeous, as is to be expected by a Sergio Leone-directed film. Eli Wallach's performance as Tuco (The Ugly) is amazing as his character needs to thread the middle ground between Clint Eastwood (The Good) and Lee Van Cleef's (The Bad) characters (also even though Wallach is playing a Mexican character it does not come across as racist/stereotypical like other westerns of the era). Like any film in the running for greatest-of-all-time status, it needs standout scenes and moments. This film has them: The Good and The Ugly leaving the mission, the POW camp, the Bridge Battle, and the famous Sad Hill Cemetery ending. The film also weaves in a fair amount of comedy. I could never rank it as the greatest film of all-time – the flourishes get to me, even if they are minor compared to others in the genre – but it could be considered a top 10 film; it is a masterpiece of cinema.
1. **Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?:** Before justifying the ranking for this film, it is worth noting how these top four exemplify four ways to make a classic (and why *Woolf* could easily be the worst of the four). *Persona* is beautifully shot with a complex (and acted) while being a mysterious mind-fuck. *Algiers* tackles a single subject and does so perfectly. *Ugly* is beautiful but is minimal on dialogue with various statements on war and greed. Ironically all three of these films has a better

claim to best film than *Woolf*. Yet I rank *Woolf* higher because it does what it aims to perfectly in more dimensions. There really aren't any grand social statements in *Woolf*. The plot, while filled with well-developed characters, does not offer hundred of interpretations. The score is good and cinematography is rather good; yet neither would classify as an all-timer. Instead what elevates the film is the (dialogue-driven) script and the performances of the four characters. Elizabeth Taylor and Richard Burton give lead performances of a lifetime. George Segal and Sandy Dennis are great. Dennis in particular helps hold the film together as plays the (seemingly) innocent mouse-y Honey; Honey's intoxication and obviousness are needed. The script is a delight. There are so many excellent lines that none of them can be spelled out here, while doing them justice. Perhaps 'Honey: never mix, never worry' followed by, 'RB: Rubbing alcohol for you? ET: Never mix never worry!', with an even more impressive, 'Is it mixed doubles tonight?' later on in the film (mixing ends up causing a lot of problems). Every single relationship deterioration film owes a debt of gratitude to *Woolf*. It is not a perfect film, but it could be overall best-acted film, and best (dialogue-driven) script. The film is a masterpiece, for reasons completely separate from the rest of the top four.