

6 October 2014

Paths of Glory (PG)

Director: **Stanley Kubrick**
USA 1957

Running time: 88 minutes

LEADING PLAYERS: **Kirk Douglas** (Colonel Dax), **Adolphe Menjou** (General Broulard), **George Macready** (General Mireau), **Ralph Meeker** (Corporal Paris), **Wayne Morris** (Lieutenant Roget), **Richard Anderson** (Major Saint-Auban), **Joseph Turkel** (Private Arnaud), **Timothy Carey** (Private Ferol).

SCRIPT: **Stanley Kubrick, Calder Willingham, Jim Thompson, from a novel by Humphrey Cobb.**
PHOTOGRAPHY: **Georg Krause.** EDITING: **Eva Kroll.** MUSIC: **Gerald Fried.**

The general outline and outcome of the plot are revealed in this review.

Last season we screened Lewis Milestone's *All Quiet on the Western Front* on Armistice Day, the very day Paul met his death from a sniper. This year we present that other 'great' World War One movie, a little shy of fifty-seven years since it was premiered in Munich. Kubrick's *Paths of Glory* is not just a potent anti-war statement, but the film which confirmed his unique quality as a filmmaker.

Whereas Remarque's novel shows the experiences of a young, impressionable private in the German army, Cobb's has as its protagonist a seasoned and articulate officer on the French side, a lawyer before the war, but distinguished enough to have risen to the rank of Colonel. To him falls the task of defending three privates from his regiment on the charge of cowardice in the face of the enemy.

The screenplay divides roughly into five acts: the setting of the objective of taking the 'Ant Hill' by Generals Broulard and Mireau; the preparations for the offensive, introducing key figures among the privates and junior officers; the attack itself, culminating in debacle; the selection of scapegoats to erase the shame brought on the French army, their prosecution and defense; the execution of sentence and final thoughts of those concerned. I only mention this because one feels very clearly the inexorable march of events as in a classical five-act tragedy. This is achieved by the writing, and the rhythm of the editing, use of establishing shots, etc.

The opening sequence is typical of Kubrick's control and conception. At first Mireau appears to be on the side of the soldiers, grimly pessimistic about the prospects for success, and realistic about the state of his men. Then the lure of personal

advancement is placed before him by Broulard, and his protestations miraculously subside. Kubrick blocks the scene again in a scheme of five: a long fluid shot following the two men as they move through the palatial splendour of the divisional chateau's drawing room, then edited close-up dialogue seated across a table, as Broulard expounds the insane objective and Mireau opposes; Broulard then rises and, appearing to change topic, sets out his bait, taking Mireau with him, and returning to his seat when he has finished; Mireau remains on his feet, and again we have cutting between them as he protests his integrity, showing he knows that the promotion depends on the other thing. Finally, there is a third follow shot as Broulard rises as if to leave, signalling this is now or never, and Mireau slowly talks himself round. Kubrick uses editing and close-up for conflict, reserving mise-en-scène for the oily art of flattery and persuasion.

There are other examples of characteristic rigour in the direction I might have focused on in such detail – the tracking shot through the trenches with its archly repeated exchanges, the clinically orchestrated court martial in the hall of the chateau, emphasising its formality, in every sense of the word. Or the execution itself, with its cruel ironies – there is so much to admire in this film.

Watch out for a brace of actors Kubrick used more than once: Joe Turkel and Timothy Carey as two of the condemned men. Turkel played Lloyd the barman in *The Shining*; Carey, an extraordinarily twitchy actor, the marksman in *The Killing*. And if you think you recognise Richard Anderson's popinjay of a Major, you do: he was Oscar Goldman in TV's *The Six Million Dollar Man*!

David Clare