'Morgan' offers glowing example of new vibrance in British cinema

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British cinema, like British theater, has undergone a strange and wonderful metamorphosis in the last few years. The generally insipid fare of the fifties has evolved into a repertory of really intriguing films—most of them black-and-white, non-epic in dimension and, above all, peculiarly British in humor.

With such characteristics, they could hardly be American. This new breed of British film relies less on the hard-driving emotional tension so typical of good American cinema (Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?) than on irony and imaginative, impressionistic photography.

'A Hard Day's Night,' 'The Knack,' and 'The Collector' are the three best films of this genre that have come to the last two years. And now 'Morgan' is here—even more sophisticated than its predecessors and certainly no less entertaining.

Overwrought Realism

The story is basically uncomplicated: a young, very schizophrenic London artist, Morgan, attempts to reinstate himself with his estranged, sociable wife, Leone. Morgan has frequent hallucinations of an ape-like existence; he is really nothing more than a child with sex drive—all of which gives the film cameramen enviable license with subject matter. Cut into the film are shots from 'Tarzan of the Apes' and 'King Kong,' as the hero imagines himself to be beastial in a tame, overwrought sort of way.

The external circumstances involved are, understandably, very funny. But this is structural irony of natural reality for Morgan is a painfully serious film. Here is a grown child: sensitive, creative, and rather like a teddy bear—ones whose only connection with adult reality is sex life with his wife.

Lifeline to Reality

She cannot really complete this lifeline with reality because she lacks trust in Morgan; as he says, she married him for the insecurity he could provide her, and the thought of a secure, empathetically involved relationship repels her emotionally.

The net result is, inevitably, institutionalized asylum from society; yet there is hope at the end, for Leone is pregnant, and this evidences a hitherto unachieved contact between her adult reality and Morgan's childish state.

Even this speculation is lim-

ited, however, by the possibility that Morgan alone experiences it. His schizophrenia is so near to the real film that it is difficult to distinguish between objective reality and the hero's "other world."

Kicks Marxism

As if this comic-tragic polarity were not entertainment enough, 'Morgan' is further suffused with external parody. Particularly trenchant is the kick at Marxism, which is used as a Christianity substitute within the social context of the film. Typically, it means nothing in the resolution of the film, and it has no salving effect on Morgan; it becomes just another idealistic human institution gone down the pragmatic drain.

'Morgan' is well done imaginatively, but not as overtly as any of Fellini's better films. It is more Fellinian for precisely this reason; the Italian director creates a transcendent reality based entirely upon images. This kaleidoscopic reality is abstract and grotesque—hard to fathom and, after all the images are counted, not even necessarily worth fathoming.

Rich in Meaning

In 'Morgan,' the reality is socially oriented: familiar, tangible, and immediately recognizable. Which is to say that this is an interesting and, above all, an entertaining film—rich in meaning but not lost among grotesque images.

David Warner, as Morgan, and Vanessa Redgrave, as Leone, act the only two really important roles in the film. This is no easy script; numerous facial close-ups mean that they must maintain unrelieved empathy with the role. They do so with unusual flair, even for the British.

And, again, 'Morgan' is very British. Mostly for this reason, it is one of the few movies now playing that should not be passed over.