



if... (BFI Film Classics)

Mark Sinker

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Lindsay Anderson's film *if...* (1968), starring Malcolm McDowell as a schoolboy who leads a guerilla insurgence, imagines how repression, conformity, and fusty ritual at an English public school could lead to anarchy and bloody revolt. Its title is a sardonic nod to Rudyard Kipling's most famous poem, and its story a radical updating of Kipling's 1899 story *Stalky and Co.*, in which prankish rebels are groomed to police the empire. Released at a time of unprecedented student uprisings in Europe and America, *if...* provided a peculiarly English perspective on the battle between generations - the perennial war of the romantically passionate against the corrupt, the ugly, the old, and the foolish. Though its emotional surface is authentically anti-authoritarian, its intellectual substance, as Mark Sinker argues, is rooted in a deep familiarity with the symbols of English ruling-class values. No longer a vehicle for shock or dissent, *if...* is today enjoyed comfortably, even nostalgically, but for Sinker this renders its many knots and paradoxes, the moments of poetry that Anderson argued were cinema's *raison d'etre*, all the more fascinating.

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