

# The Language of Film

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**Film:** Piccadilly

**Director:** E A Dupont

**Stars:** Anna May Wong, Gilda Gray, Jameson Thomas, Charles Laughton

**Genre:** Crime / Drama

**Run time:** 1hr 32min

**Rated:** PG

**Rating:** 3/5

## Piccadilly (1929)



*Piccadilly* is a silent movie based on the glamorous world of a London **revue bar** and the entangled relationships behind its inner workings with **spurned love**, rivalry and jealousy that results in murder.

The film's story centres around the Piccadilly Club and its owner Valentine Wilmot. The club's high society **clientele** come to drink and dine at this **decadent** venue whilst being entertained by its top dance act Mabel and Victor. Its **auspicious** setting is a perfect platform for the dance couple to show off their star qualities but when the music stops we find an awkward **love tryst** between Victor, Mabel and Valentine.

The demands of running the club are put to the test when a **commotion** from a dissatisfied customer in the restaurant interrupts Mabel's dancing and Valentine has to return a dirty plate to the kitchens. There he finds a kitchen-hand Shosho dancing on the tables for the entertainment of the kitchen staff. She is instantly dismissed and sent home, but when the business' **takings** begin to suffer after Victor quits for America, Valentine hits upon the idea of introducing a new exotic dance act, Shosho, to lift the club's failing fortunes.

Written by Arnold Bennett who is best known for his work about class, poverty and race the film contrasts the glamour of the West End scene with the working class diners and homes in the surrounding areas of an already cosmopolitan London. Anna May Wong who plays Shosho brings great style and poise to her role. She is

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recognised as the first Chinese American actress to become a big Hollywood star and, in one of the last silent movies ever made, where suggestion and intimation are powerful tools, she gives a delightfully skilled performance.

It is a nicely shot film which has easy to follow silent movie captions that for its time must have **raised a few eyebrows** but it still manages to poke fun at itself with an old fashioned British sensibility and humour towards the **superficial** nonsense that is driving its characters towards murder, all encapsulated by its sympathetic jolly jazz band soundtrack.

## Similar films:

Café Society (2016) – Dir: Woody Allen; Stars: Jesse Eisenberg, Kristin Stewart

Chinatown (1974) - Dir: Roman Polanski; Stars: Jack Nicholson, Faye Dunaway

## Exercises:

### A. Questions True or False:

1. The film is about a glamorous dance club in London and its proprietor? T/F?
2. All the customers are perfectly happy dining in the restaurant? T/F?
3. Shosho delights the owner by dancing on the kitchen table? T/F
4. Victor leaves the nightclub to go abroad? T/F
5. Shosho will become the venue's new dance act? T/F
6. The film lacks a sympathetic sense of humour? T/F

### B. Vocabulary / Phrases Match

- |                         |                       |
|-------------------------|-----------------------|
| 1. revue bar            | a. customers          |
| 2. spurned love         | b. promising success  |
| 3. clientele            | c. shock              |
| 4. decadent             | d. shallow            |
| 5. auspicious           | e. rejected           |
| 6. love tryst           | f. excessive pleasure |
| 7. commotion            | g. sales              |
| 8. takings              | h. theatrical bar     |
| 9. raise a few eyebrows | i. disturbance        |
| 10. superficial         | j. amorous meeting    |

### C. Discussion Questions:

1. What can you see in the picture?
2. Do you like old black and white films or silent movies? Why / why not?
3. Have you ever been to a revue bar before with a bar, restaurant and performers?
4. Do you think Shosho should have been fired for dancing in the kitchen?
5. Is your town or city very cosmopolitan?



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## Listening Gap Fill

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