Evaluation Essay
Movie Review

Everybody goes to the movie, it seems, to be entertained, but how many go to study movies as works of art. That is what movie reviewing involves: seeing a film as more than an adventure or escape vehicle. It is, in many ways, seeing it as a book, or a painting, or a piece of sculpture – in other words, as a work of art.

Actually, movies mirror life. Like books, they focus on people and the problems of life. The major difference is that in the movies, life unfolds on a screen. It is a reality, nevertheless. Look for the following in a movie:

1. Theme
2. Artistic Focus
3. Realism or fantasy
4. Conflict
5. Characterization

6. Acting
7. Dialogue
8. Film technique
9. Scenery
10. Musical background

The problem with reviewing a movie is that you are seated in the dark and thus cannot take notes. Therefore, you have to rely on memory, but if you train your eye to see more than the story, you can retain a lot of information that would be useful in composing a review. For example, consider the movie *The Front*, starring Woody Allen. It is a bold film that tries to capture those frightful days of the early 1950s when so many artists were blacklisted because they were accused of being Communists. Because they refused to testify, or avoided the questions of the House Un-American Activities Committee, they lost their jobs and were never employed again.

Or, you can deal with the character Woody Allen plays, a front man for blacklisted writers who collects fees for their scripts. In the process of deceiving others, he gets caught up in the personal greed and public conscience. Allen, a comic actor of great talent, plays this part somewhat seriously and thus makes us believe that there are people who, when others are down, will take advantage to gain something for themselves.

Thus we have identified two key elements worth reviewing in *The Front* – theme and characterization.

If you were going to review the film *The Exorcist*, you would probably deal with the fantastic effects used to convey the devil. So convincing are these special effects that the audience is shocked and horrified. You yourself don't have to believe in such evil forces, gut watching the movie certainly makes you aware of their possible existence.

In the film *Rocky*, your attention would be focused chiefly on a good-hearted fighter striving to make it in a tough world. The odds are against him, but he never loses his decency. The **conflict** or struggle he faces is that of a man in his thirties battling to be a success in a world that works against him. Thus tension builds as we see him rise to that great moment, the big fight. We support him all the way because he is a symbol of the little man against the powers-that-be.

<u>Procedure</u>: How do you put a movie review together?

Step One: **WATCH THE MOVIE CAREFULLY** – Use an observant eye, not just an eye for entertainment. An observant eye means looking for strengths and weaknesses in a film.

Step Two: **RECORD YOUR OBSERVATIONS IN A NOTEBOOK AFTER THE FILM IS OVER** – Write down what you liked or disliked about the film immediately, as there is a tendency to forget your first impressions.

Step Three: **LOOK FOR A CENTRAL FOCUS** – As in books, films do have a "center." It may be a larger theme about people and how they face life or a more specific development of a character and how he or she develops. Sometimes the focus may be an issue that is current and vital, such as crime in the streets, the values of the younger generation, or the corruption of the government. You have to train yourself to grasp an issue when it is there before you.

Step Four: **NOTICE TECHNICAL ASPECTS** - Note techniques such as the musical background, the scenery, the lighting, the acting, the use of camera angle. You should be able to explain how each is effectively conveyed, and how each contributes to the meaning of the film as whole.

Step Five: **CONSIDER THE GOOD AND BAD POINTS** – Comment on what you perceive to be the positive aspects of the film. Support them with examples. Then refer to the negative aspects, those you see as

weakening the film. In other words, a good movie review is a balance of both the good and bad points.

(For examples of movie reviews, see Roger Ebert and Richard Roper of the *Chicago Sun-Times*, Michael Willmington of the *Chicago Tribune*, or Larry Ratliff of the *San Antonio Express-News*.)

How to Write A Movie Review

FIRST PARAGRAPH: Should contain the following information:

1. Title of the film (underlined): _____

2. Director's Name: _____

3. Value Judgment (Excellent, Very Good, Good, Fair, Poor): _____

4. Criteria (reasons) for value judgment in #3:

    a. _____

    b. _____

    c. _____

5. Statement of the theme (central insight of the film): _____

    _____

6. Genre of Film (drama, action, comedy, documentary):_____

After you have filled out the information above, write the FIRST PARAGRAPH (using this information) in the space below:

SECOND PARAGRAPH: Retell the story without interpretation, focusing on the
                     key facts and characters, in 100 words or less.

THIRD PARAGRAPH: Elaborate on the criteria stated in #3 and #4 above.
                     Offer specific examples of each. This is the paragraph
                     in which to state your personal opinion of the film;
                     however, personal opinions are more credible when there
                     is specific evidence to support them.

                     Film Questions from A to Z

The following questions may give you some direction in thinking about
organizing, and developing material for an original film review. Based on your

own reading or reviews, add what you consider additional important questions to consider.

    a. What subject matter, issue, theme, or topic source does this film consider?

    b. What is the main story line and source of conflict?

    c. What are the place setting and time period?

    d. Are the characters believable? Sympathetic? Heroic? Villainous? Do we learn enough about them?

    e. Who are the major characters? What actors portray them?

    f. Is the acting style exaggerated, realistic or understated? Is it uneven? Does it do justice to the characters?

    g. Are the actors appropriate to their film roles?

    h. How does this film portray or distort real life?

    i. What values does the film communicate, challenge or ignore?

    j. What tone (attitude) does the film take toward its subject? Is it tragic? Comic? Satiric? Romantic?

    k. Is the film entertainment or propaganda?

    l. Is the film true to historical facts and truth?

    m. How does the film handle emotion? Is it sentimental or sincere?

    n. What elements unify the film?

    o. Is the film well paced? Are there tedious parts that seem to detract from its purpose? How could it be better edited?

    p. How do all of the images of the film communicate mood? Does one mood dominate?

    q. Are any images repeated enough and in a specific context that they seem to be used as symbols?

    r. How does color (or black and white) enhance the film?

    s. How are light and shadow (shading) used effectively?

    t. How does the camera work (panorama, tracking shots, zooms, close-ups) produce specific effects?

    u. Why is this film worth seeing?

    v. How is this film similar to or different from other films like it?

    w. How would you rate this film? Excellent? Very good? Good? Fair? Poor?

    x. y. z.   (add your own questions) _____