

5.11 Film Criticism and Review

Aim

- ☉ To acquire skills to write a film review
- ☉ To understand film genre and make a simple film criticism

Procedure:

- ☉ Watch a movie as a group and express opinions as regards the storyline, values conveyed and quality of photography.

Input

FILM: A film is a complex language made up of images, movement, action, light and shade, sound (dialogue, music, natural sounds and sounds and silence) and colours. Film can be seen as a technique of recording, conserving and projecting images in movement. Besides being a technique, it is also a means of expression, representation and communication, it makes itself understood through a particular language, which has its own grammar.

Films are not images produced through our immediate and direct contact with the world. Rather, films are mediated visions of the world. They provide us an indirect vision, one which is filtered through the lens not just of a camera, but also someone else (and that could be you) who has a particular interest in seeing the world in a particular way (aesthetic, moral or purely economic).

TYPES OF FILM CRITICISM

There are many types of film criticism

- 1. Genre criticism-** this refers to the attempt to structure and order text into a kind of formula for the convenience of both the producer and audience.
Strategies for constructing generic categories:
Aesthetic (appropriateness of the textual characteristics)
Ritual (repeated structures that emphasizes the shared cultural values of the audience and the producer)
And lastly Ideological strategy (the text orients the audience to see things in a particular way)
- 2. Textual Criticism/Journalistic Film Criticism:** Takes into consideration, the plot, the characters, the themes the technical devices.
- 3. Humanistic Approach:** This approach is concerned with the importance of human values in movies.
- 4. Ideological or Academic Approach:** Commonly used by film scholars and students. It seeks to answer the basic question, “What is a cinema?”

In this lesson we shall deal with two types of Film criticism and a Film review

A. JOURNALISTIC NARRATIVE FILM CRITICISM

The reviewer often sees film once and has a very short period to write up the review; also tends to be short to medium length articles. Although they are often quick takes on a movie, they can sometimes be substantial and insightful.

Often genre identification, (drama, police detective, history, Western, etc), plot summary make up the majority of the review: it includes fast assessment of the aesthetic (shots, images. Lighting, sound, casting, etc), entertainment, social, and cultural merits.

Journalistic film review may also aim at advertising. The primary purpose of these film reviews is to publicize a film and to convince readers to go watch it. Phrases associated with this kind of reviewing include “spectacular”, “thrilling”, “edge of the seat”, “joy-ride”, etc. This, of course is, adulteration of criticism as they are usually done by those obscure reviewers whom nobody in the business knows about.

1. How is the story told? (linear, with flashbacks, flash-forwards, episodically?)
What “happens” on the level of the plot? How do plot and story differ, if at all?
2. Can the sequence be divided into individual segments (indicated, for instance, by shifts of location, jumps in time, inter-titles, etc.)? Mention some of them. How many simultaneous narratives (sub-stories) does the sequence contain?

Materials Required

- ☉ Pen and Paper
- ☉ Equipments to watch a movie



3. How do the various channels of information used in film - image, speech, sound, music, writing - interact to produce meaning? Does one of the channels dominate in this sequence?
4. Is there a recognizable source of the narration? Voice-over or off-screen commentary? What is the narrator's perspective?
5. How does the narrative position the spectator *vis-à-vis* the onscreen events and characters? Are we made to respond in certain ways to certain events (say, through music that "tells" us how to respond or distances us from the action)?

B. Humanistic Film Criticism

The Christian Filmgoer's Dilemma

The entertainment industry finds it difficult to present the art of storytelling without today's cinema staples - offensive language, exploitive sex, crude humor or brutal violence. For example, in nearly every film represented by Oscar's nod, God's name is misused.

Screenwriter Brian Godawa tackles the tough issues Christians face in their movie viewing choices, examining the redemptive emphasis of storytelling, the competing worldviews expressed through today's cinema, and spirituality in the movies. Godawa's analysis offers a contemporary perspective on an important focal point of cultural dialogue: the language of movies.

• *Excess and abstinence.* Godawa first establishes the dangers of excess, both in movie consumption *and* movie-avoidance. "Cultural abstainers often end up in irrelevance and alienation from others. I call these artistic teetotalers *cultural anorexics*. . . . The arts (of which movies are a part) are a God-given means of expressing our humanity. The creation of art, though flawed or imperfect, reflects the creativity and beauty of our Creator. To reject any of the arts *in total* is to reject the *imago Dei*, the image of God in humanity."

Someone who thoughtlessly devours any movie and lumps them all under the umbrella of "entertainment", is a cultural glutton. "Cultural gluttons prefer to avoid analyzing movies beyond their entertainment value," Godawa says.

The key to all stories, according to Godawa, is their redemptive core. "They narrate the events surrounding characters who overcome obstacles to achieve some goal and who, in the process, are confronted with their personal need for change. In short, movie storytelling is about *redemption*-the recovery of something lost or the attainment of something needed."

1. What are the socio-historical background to the film, economic and political factors that conditioned its making and explain its existence?
2. How are the views expressed by the lead characters 'TRUTH' for the audience to believe?
3. How are the women portrayed? Is there any blatant discrimination?
4. What is the balance between entertainment and values in the movie?
5. What Gospel values can be attributed to the movie? Find a passage in the Bible that connects with this movie.

C. Film Review

David Bordwell suggests in his book *Making Meaning*, that there are four key components present in film reviews. These components consist of a condensed plot synopsis, background information, a set of abbreviated arguments about the film, and an evaluation.

Condensed Plot Synopsis: A condensed plot synopsis means exactly that. This is a brief description of the film's plot that probably emphasizes the most important moments of the film without revealing the film's ending. Nothing is worse than revealing too much about the movie and thus ruining it for the viewer.

Background Information: Background information about the film consists of information about the stars, the director, and the production staff of the film. It can also include interesting tidbits about the making of the film (example, entirely shot on location, or studio: this information may interest a viewer). It may incorporate information about the film's source material (is it an adaptation or a book? Is it a real life story, etc) as well as mentioning the type of genre (is it an action film, drama, history, narrative, Western, etc) the film fits into. If the reviewer is so inclined, it may also include comments from other reviewers and industry insiders that are designed to indicate to the reader what the film's reception is likely to be.

Abbreviated Arguments about the Film: The abbreviated arguments about the film are generally the main focus of the review. This is the section in which the reviewer analyzes and critiques the film. The focus of this segment is to point out what does and does not work in the movie and why. Most reviewers attempt to combine this information with a little background information. For example, if the lighting and composition of the film are particularly dreadful the reviewer will generally take the time to note who the film's cinematographer was - since it's the cinematographer's responsibility to prevent that from happening.

Evaluation: The reviewer's evaluation of the film generally includes a recommendation to either see or avoid seeing the film. This evaluation is always based on the reviewer's arguments about the film and is frequently backed up with his/her comments regarding the film's background. Your instructor would argue that the entire tone of the review should be influenced by the reviewer's evaluation of the film. To be honest, the reader should have a fairly clear idea of the reviewer's opinion after they have read the review's opening sentence. This does NOT mean that you should start a review with statements like, "This was a good movie," or "you should go see this film right now!" It does mean that the reader should have a general idea about where the reviewer stands on the film from the first paragraph on.

1. Does the film hold your attention and arouse your emotions (film is an emotion machine)?
2. Are there characters or characteristics (themes) that you can identify with in real life?
3. What is the story about? Describe the 'catharsis' (resolution of conflict).



4. Give the brief credit list
5. Your informed opinion about the movie, cautions, audience, rating etc.

Review

A film is a complex language made up of images, movement, action, light and shade, sound (dialogue, music, natural sounds and sounds and silence) and colours.

There are several types of film criticism namely:

Genre criticism

Ideological or Academic Approach

Humanistic Approach

Textual Criticism/Journalistic Film Criticism

Journalistic Criticism

3. There are four key components present in film reviews. These components are:

a condensed plot synopsis

background information

a set of abbreviated arguments about the film

an evaluation.

Reflection

Twenty-four frames a second, 100 heartbeats a minute, a dozen emotional high an hour, probing thoughts for weeks, lingering memories for months and shockwaves that last a lifetime: that is cinema.

Relevant Skills

Watch a famous movie e.g. Forrest Gump, Bridge Over River Kwai, Singing in the Rain and write a review, a Journalistic and a Humanistic criticism.

References

HYPERLINK “<http://www.christianitytoday.org>” www.christianitytoday.org

