

On film reviews by David Walsh

1 February 2000

Mr. Walsh,

I am so glad that I ran across your reviews recently. I've grown up with films being an important part of my life and I do believe they are an important art form. As such they carry great social importance. I have found few reviewers who are able to really add much to my film watching experience. Local film reviewers (*San Francisco Chronicle*) and most others I see in national publications are not unwilling to share their opinions about one film or another but everyone is (unhappily) entitled to his/her own opinion. Roger Ebert was one exception for me, as in many of his reviews I was able to come away with a wider view of what went on in some films. Alas with his own growing celebrity (and perhaps not coincidentally) the death of Gene Siskel, his reviews have lost a great deal for me.

I stumbled across a review of yours through the web site Cinemachine. I'm not sure which was the first but then I read your review of *The Thin Red Line* and felt of all of the reviews I read of that film (100s) yours was the ... and at this point I'm not sure what to say (best, most accurate, agreed with me the most), added the most to what I thought was a transcendental piece of art and social commentary.

So I read all of your other reviews. I was amused, I must say, by the concept of a "Socialist Film Reviewer." Why? I'm not exactly sure. I suppose it has to do with the political climate which sees capitalism as having "destroyed" socialism economically. I suppose it might be akin to reading an Amish Film Reviewer. I hope you don't take offense at that for it says much more about me than about you or Socialism.

What I have found is most gratifying to me. Your reviews, whether I agree with them or not, come from a view point which is consistent and humanely oriented. What a revelation! For the most part I get a great deal from all of your reviews whether I agree with them or not. Two pointed examples are *American Beauty*, which I enjoyed immensely and *Girl Interrupted*. In the

former the level of the energy you put into the review was sign enough for me that the film worked. I didn't feel I had or didn't have to agree or disagree with you or the film.

I thoroughly enjoyed *Girl Interrupted* and related to it in that I too spent time, voluntarily, in a local psychiatric "hospital" and as a result felt compelled to see this movie. I found there to be some "real" truth to many of the scenes and characters therein. Most reviewers were at best lukewarm to the film and people I talked to didn't seem too moved, not seeing any resolutions or transformations going on in the film. One exception was a man I met who'd had a similar experience to the film's heroine, and he was stunned and moved as I was.

I was a little surprised to see that you'd reviewed it at all. I was disappointed that it was ultimately dissatisfying for you but I felt your comments were again very insightful. I believe that you gave it the viewing and response it deserved. And I believe your observation "It's true, as he says, that there is 'no simple answer,' but might there not be a complicated one?" to be telling on one level and miss the (not so) obvious answer given by the writers, actors, and director. The film is ambiguous about the process which takes Susanna from point A to point A. The destination itself is ambiguous. She's back where she started, as William Blake put it, "to sulk upon my mother's breast." Ambiguity is not an easy pill for anyone to swallow. I did not see Lisa as defeated in the end but then I have this uncured romantic streak and always root for the underdog no matter the odds.

Thank you for your insight. I admire your commitment to human rights and to art and to holding those fortunate enough to be filmmakers responsible for their work. Keep up the good work.

GB

29 January 2000

To David Walsh :

Like with so many films that you review, it seems to take quite a while for them to reach Australia. *American Beauty* has only just been released here and is getting rave reviews. I enjoyed a lot of things about the film, certainly I thought the performances were outstanding but the film itself I feel has many flaws.

If the film is supposed to be an "exercise in social commentary" then it falls far short.

Why is it the repressed homosexual marine colonel who shoots [is it fair to say the hero of the film] Lester Burnham. Surely middle class white males have more to be fearful of than homosexual neighbours? In Australia we have recently had an advertising campaign telling us all to be more careful at work. In the ad, the father waves goodbye to the kids, kisses the wife and heads off to work, unfortunately never to return. This is only one example ... cancer, heart attack, etc. ... the list goes on.

But in this film, that is receiving glowing reviews and we're told is an insightful look into middle class America, the biggest threat comes from the neighbour next door. Although for a short period we are suppose to think it's his wife who is going to kill him, or his daughter, but none of this would be supported by any facts from the real world.

I would also have enjoyed to see a little of Lester at work in the hamburger drive-thru ... it truly would have felt like a return to his youthful summer holidays when he received his pay cheque.

Anyway, thanks for your review. I'm sending it to all my friends and it's causing lively debate, more so than the film itself did.

T
27 January 2000

Just saw *The Insider* and really enjoyed it. A mate came along with me, mostly on the strength of what you'd written in your review, and thought it was an excellent film as well.

Thanks
T
31 January 2000



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