

Letters from our readers

3 January 2013

On “David O. Russell’s *The Fighter*: ‘Big-hearted’ people treated seriously”

I recently saw this film.

I must say that Joanne hit the nail on the head when she states that there is too much of a tendency in the film to accept the characters as they are rather than leveling criticism at some of the surrounding conditions which shape their existence. In this narrow and somewhat “empirical” method, it does seem to lead down the road of making a virtue of necessity, and glorifies the concept of the American Dream. Does Micky Ward’s win really equal a win for Lowell, as his brother in the film says? One certainly gets a sense of the fragile character of these people’s social existence, and it seems that to criticize their conceptions in any way in the director’s eyes may have been too much. It requires a much wider scope of understanding of the given social order than the director was able to apply on this question.

Nick

Washington, DC, USA

28 December 2012

On “An exchange on ‘The Hurt Locker, the Academy Awards and the rehabilitation of the Iraq war’”

Where are her ideas taking her? She realizes that the American cinema-goer will not openly embrace violence without the little emotional strappings attached to it. But clearly, she seems to want to see a change in the American psyche where her full faculties can be then brought to bear on her work.

Her work is a conscious attempt to hasten this process.

Thushara

30 December 2012

On “*The Hobbit: An Unexpected Journey*—not so unexpected as all that”

While the *Lord of the Rings* trilogy went a long way to reducing Tolkien’s books to the banal Hollywood

action-and-adventure fare of the day, my first impression of *The Hobbit* is that it made a cliché of the pre-established banality. Respect for the content and (more importantly) the spirit of the text has been totally lost in the apparent goal of making a “prequel” at a dramatic and literary level manageable for elementary school children.

In fact that’s probably being much too gracious. As a kid I adored *The Hobbit* absent any CGI battle scenes.

You point out that the scene between Golem and Bilbo is easily the best in the film. I agree, but I think you give it a bit too much credit. The actors have done a very good job with what was given them (and much of the dialogue is true to Tolkien here), but Peter Jackson was obviously uncomfortable filming the scene. There is no patience, the camera is always eager to return to the blockbuster goblin-chase scene. In a moment of fate and mystery which in a sense ties together the whole of Tolkien’s works, Jackson can neither dim the lights (the two should be engulfed in blackness), take a 10-minute respite from the violence, or slow down the pace significantly.

The ironic thing, really, is that a blood-thirsty Golem chomping his teeth next to Bilbo’s head isn’t even frightening, it’s only annoying and plastic—like the rest of the film.

Julian Q

27 December 2012

On “A new film version of Tolstoy’s *Anna Karenina* (and Sean Baker’s *Starlet*)”

I enjoyed Joe Wright’s *Anna Karenina*. As you say, it is an “intelligent distillation of the Tolstoy novel.” However, I thought a little bit about the weaknesses and hoped the WWSW would review it so I could have some help thinking through my own reactions.

I did not particularly like the theater backdrop either. I did not know Tolstoy was considered a realist, but that is probably why I like him. On the other hand, I did like the kind of rhythmic, dancelike way that various

activities were portrayed in this film. It seemed to be symbolic of people being swept into a social dynamic they did not understand or consent to consciously, though I'm not sure that's actually what was intended. That isn't exactly a realist approach, but I didn't think it interfered with the film's content. Perhaps it is just unusual and visually pleasing and I am reading into it. It certainly isn't an adequate replacement for a more careful portrayal of the social causes of the trajectories of people's lives. I am somewhat skeptical about the ability of a film to come very close to measuring up to a novel in that respect, but I agree that it would have been better if Wright had made more of an effort.

I did not like the ending of Tolstoy's novel at all, though I don't know whether I would have a different reaction to it now 9 or 10 years after reading it first. I thought it should have ended after Anna committed suicide. The portrayal of her thoughts leading up to her suicide was terrifyingly realistic. It took me several days to recover after reading that. It seemed as though Tolstoy prolonged the story about Levin and his wife after that mainly in order to promote certain ridiculously utopian political ideas. The whole thing was rather saccharine. To some extent I think Wright is uncritically reflecting this weakness in the original novel.

The anti-rationality dialog between Levin and the peasant after which he tells his wife he has "understood something" is annoying, but I cannot remember if this was present in the novel or not. The idea that emotional impulses are inexplicable or are fundamentally disconnected from reason is simply false. The movie itself refutes the idea, though Wright's failure to explore more deeply why people had the impulses they did in this society is, as you say, its main weakness in the other parts.

"Nor does Taylor-Johnson as Vronsky properly pin down the part his character plays in Anna's horrible torment, whose ultimate source is the mendacity and chicanery of his social milieu." I think this is a good point. The idea that Anna and Vronsky confused sexual love and true love is a gross oversimplification of the deeper social causes for their actions, but it points to why Wright finds relationships somewhat inexplicable.

How does this film measure up as compared with the other film versions of *Anna Karenina* ?

Rosa S



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