

Assorted Short Critical Reviews

Having compiled enough individual reviews, not having a market for the one's that I have already written, and believing that there are MUCH better uses of my time, the following is a compilation of short reviews for ALL of the books, movies, and other media, which has passed through my hands since 11-17-08. Hopefully, I'll be able to keep my comments to 100 words or less, which means this introductory paragraph is the target length of EVERY future review. Items are listed alphabetically by title.

Title, Author (*****: % read, pages/words): review (target = 100 words).

Alex Plays the Game, Charles Peattie and Russell Taylor (*****:100% read, 360 odd comic strips): the set up is predictable enough, three panels of a comic strip leading to a fourth panel, which turns out to be not quite what one might have expected. Not uproariously funny, but fun nonetheless. In the end, as good a way as any to take in another culture, learn a few words of the King's English, get a taste for cricket, and the like. (11-19-08)

Apocalypto, Mel Gibson (*:15% movie, 138m 2006): this historically based slasher flick is way too bloody for my tastes. The film follows the plight of a Mayan clan who become sacrificial victims--with all the blood and gore that might imply. The most compelling question the movie raises is how the morality of this work fits in with Mel Gibson's personal religion vis-a-vie The Passion of Christ. (12-5-08)

Art & Antiques, December 2005 (***: 100% browse, 112 pages, pictures): believe it or not, I paged halfway through the magazine before I noticed that I had already read this issue. Gave me inspiration for two short poems. Definitely worth the 15-20 minutes. (11-28-08)

The Art and Science of Fencing, Nick Evangelista (**: 50% read, 275p 137,500w): a good introduction of fencing for the novice, but his opinions are a bit too intrusive. For instance, the author advocates that youngsters not be allowed to bout (spar) until they are 12. Um, this is stupid. His reasoning is that those under 12 haven't developed the needed abstract mental capabilities, which is ridiculous. Might as well advocate those under 12 not play chess, study history, or learn about politics, because they are not yet ready. Anyhow, without belaboring the point, the book is full of his opinions (as they relate to fencing) that are for the most part unfounded, unsupported, and which reek of exclusive fencing elitism. For instance, it is not uncommon for him to relate a style, admit that it has taken over the fencing world (perhaps because it works), and then to complain about its lack of refinement. Sorry, I guess my priorities were wrong. Style and tradition, that's what's most important to Evangelista, not anything having to do with practicality. Wake up! Get with the program, dude. Bottom line, if I was looking for a fencing instructor, I would look further. The subject matter, on the other hand, was interesting (about 50% of the time when it didn't devolve into technical specifics), and this is what carried the book. Its writing and organization was decidedly amateurish. I wouldn't be surprised to learn that many of the chapters started as handouts for his students. (12-13-08)

Batman: The Movie, 1966 (***: 15%, 104 minutes): funnier than I would have expected. So stupid that it had no pretensions. I had intended to write a paper/essay detailing the comparisons between the Beats and the throwaway lackeys of the Joker, Riddler, Penguin, and Catwoman, but the lackeys aren't the focus of the movie (go figure), and the rest... I didn't want to bother with.

Beat Literature: Kerouac, Corso, Ginsberg, Burroughs, and others (*****:100% read, 125pg/50,000wrd): a good introduction into the Beat movement and their efforts to transcend the

mediocrity and banality of the post WWII world. Ginsberg Howl, and Kerouac Subterraneans, On the Road, & The Dharma Bums were mentioned way too often, but perhaps those were the only references, which caught my eyes. The pro/con debate at the end was rather sophomoric and uninspired, yet I'll still give the book five stars. (11-25-08)

Beyond the Horizon: Adventures in Faraway Lands, National Geographic Special (**: 100% pictures, 200 pages): better off with a standard National Geographic magazine. Pictures of Iceland were very enjoyable--very green. I am drawn to Iceland these days. (11-29-08)

Bon Appetit, October 2008 (*: 10% skim, 150p probably same number of recipes): not worth reading for me. I'm simply not interested in following that complicated of a recipe. (12-13-08)

Brighton Beach Memoirs, Neil Simon, Parker School Theatre Waimea (***:100%, 2.5 hours): funny enough writing even though the acting was stiff and emotionless at times. The chief insight here is that if you want to write a play for the community theatre scene, you really can't go wrong with the title: A Play for Five Mediocre Actors in Three Parts. Bright lights in my eyes, but at least no loud piano. It's unfortunate that the actor playing Eugene (Neil Simon?) was cast based on his appearance rather than his skill at delivering a punchline.

Cash Back (*****: 100% movie, 101min 2006): nice still motion special effects form the basis of the film/plot where all the world stops except for the main character/narrator. Lots of cheesecake and a leading female romantic interest that keeps on getting progressively better looking. Perhaps the movie ends a bit sappily, but what do you want? (12-2-08)

Casino Royal (*: 10% movie, 131 min 1967): astoundingly bad. Thanks to porn, they don't make movies like this anymore. It sort of gives you a newfound appreciation for the entire sex flick industry. Words cannot describe how awful this movie is... while at the same time, how oddly erotic and painfully funny it can be. (11-29-08)

A Day in the Life of a Circus Clown, Troll Associates (***: 100% read, 32p 2,000 w w/pictures): nice children's book. Perhaps not great. I have no desire to either see a circus or become a clown. Fun enough though. (12-6-08)

Getting it Down: How to Put Your Ideas on Paper, Judi Kesselman-Turkel and Franklynn Peterson (*:5% skim, 75p/26,250w): a HS thesis primer. Not much use for me at this point in my life. (11-27-08)

The Greatest Miracle in the World, Og Mandino (*: 5% skim, 108p 37,800w): skip ahead to chapter 9 and read The God Memorandum. The rest of the book is packaging for this short (5,000w) stream of consciousness guide to happiness. (12-6-08)

Hancock (**: 100% movie, 92m 2006): yeah, so Hancock is this anti-superhero fuck-up who has a wife that he can't remember and whenever they get together he loses his power. You can see the romantic struggle this might create on a theoretical basis, but it just doesn't pan out. Instead, it's sort of stupid and insipidly, all the more so because they decided to make it a mixed race marriage. A six year old boy features prominently in the movie; I figure he was the target audience. (12-3-08)

How to be a Happily Married Mistress (*:20% skim, 188p 47,000w): a guidebook on how to be a housewife. If I had a mistress (or a wife for that matter), I can't think of a single reason

to recommend this book to her. I simply expected... more out of a book with mistress in the title. (12-1-08)

I.D. The International Design Magazine, Sep/Oct 2008 (**: 100% skim, 86p 27,950w): mostly just looked at the pictures. Chairs continue to have far too central of a place in modern design pedagogy as do nonsense sculptures and bits of concept art. (12-10-08)

Incircle Entrée, Holiday 2008 (***: 100% picture magazine, 156p): actually this is the second Incircle I've looked at recently. Turns out it's a Neiman Marcus marketing device. Still, I enjoy the pictures/advertisements, which have been known to inspire a poem or two. (12-1-08)

Love Life for every married couple, Ed Wheat, M.D. & Gloria Okes Perkins (*: 1% skim, 336p 84,000w): on the copyright page reference is made to three separate bibles. I should have stopped right there. You will be happy to know that God has yoked married couples together to do his work. (12-7-08)

More the Official Polish Joke Book/More the Official Italian Joke Book, Larry Wilde (*: 5% a few jokes, 200pg/40,000w): not funny, not worth reading. Maybe in another time and place (say 2nd grade), but not now. (11-22-08)

National Geographic, July 2007 (**: 10%, 150pg/75,000w): liked the article on swarms. Didn't read much else. Not in the mood mainly. As always, the pictures are divine. Can't help but come up with a story idea or two. (11-25-08)

National Geographic, March 2008 (***: 30% read): the president's note reads, "National Geographic is not an advocacy organization." I beg to differ. Every article--for good, or for bad--has a bias, and although both sides are often presented, I do not

believe for a moment that either the writers or the editors were unconscious about which view they wished to favor. (11-27-08)

The New Yorker, Mar 31, 2008 (**: 10%, 125pg/125,000w): I already perused this issue, so it was quick going. Most interesting were the articles I hadn't read the first time around--as I'd read everything else, this made them seem more interesting (at least for a second or two). In the end, I actually read precious little of it. (11-26-08)

The New Yorker, June 30, 2008 (**: 20%, 88p, 88,000w): the article on itching was good--perhaps a page or two too long. Skipped most of the rest. Read two critical reviews. One has to wonder, why waste the time reading a review of something that sucked? (12-10-08) *{Or write... there is wisdom in there somewhere.}*

The New Yorker, July 28, 2008 (**: 10% read, 88p, 88,000w): read a good article on marijuana and the 420 law. Huge underground economy. Perhaps obviously most of the names are pseudonyms. But then, why go into so much descriptive detail? Miranda from Nicaragua has long black hair, a dolphin tattoo on her right shoulder, and prefers Pall Malls to all other brands of cigarettes. If we're using pseudonyms to protect their anonymity, how does revealing that she has a dolphin tattoo help--either us or her? (12-12-08) *{Note to protect the anonymity of the article, I may have changed a few facts, perhaps that bit about a dolphin tattoo.}*

The New Yorker, August 11 & 18, 2008 (*: 5% skim (or more accurately 100% skim, maybe 5% read), 98p 98,000w): didn't read any articles. Bit about a human chameleon sounded interesting, but didn't feel like exposing my soul. (12-12-08)

The New Yorker, September 8, 2008 (*:5% read, 84p, 84,000): interesting piece on music and on how classical music used to be in the background (as apposed to the center of focused attention today). Could be a good launching place for a Mish'ish story.

The New Yorker, Sept 29, 2008 (**: 10% read, 96p 96,000w): I grow weary of reviewing The New Yorker. An interesting article on animal rights. It seems I'm finding one article per issue to read. (12-14-08)

The New Yorker, Oct 6, 2008 (**; 10%, 100p 100,000w): got halfway through a critique of an oil painter when I realized the critique was meaningless without a greater representation of Elizabeth Peyton's work. As always, continue to like the book reviews: John Stuart Mill in 7,500 words. (11-30-08)

The New Yorker, Oct 13, 2008 (*: 10%, 154p 154,000w): too much on the elections, though a history of the actual voting process was quite informative. Apparently the secret ballot (let alone the written ballot) was only an invention of the last 125 years. (12-14-08)

The Paideia Proposal: An Educational Manifesto, Mortimer J. Adler (*: 10% skim, 80pg/20,000w): on the assumption that education should to help one become a self actualized human being, a conscientious citizen, and capable of learning a trade, The Paideia Proposal puts forth that all K-12 students be given the same course of study (with no electives nor specific vocational training), which is to include the standard didactic methods (of listening to lectures and reading), one-on-one coaching (skill training), and discussion groups (and/or proctored debates). Unfortunately precious little practical advice is given concerning the realities of the world and the problems facing the current educational system (i.e. unmotivated students, parents, and

teachers; along with discipline, substance abuse, and conflicting cultural issues to name just a few). Contrary to the stated goal of equal education for all, while reading the book, I found myself daydreaming about running a super-elitist high school. (11-18-08)

Pride and Prejudice, Jane Austen (*****: 100% read, 290p 145,000 w): started reading this on an electronic file 3-6 months ago. Got the paperback today, and finished in fifteen minutes. I'd like to do some sort of rewrite on this, twisting it out a little and working on the assumption that all of the characters are witches. (12-1-08) *{Fifteen minutes just seems wrong. But it's been so long. Was I near the end? Used to read much-much faster? Or did I mean fifteen days? I've read P&P several times now, by the way. I'm a bit of an auteur... if that's a word.}*

Ratatouille (***: 50%, 111min): stopped watching in the middle. Nice chase scenes. Pleasant enough story. But I guess the last straw was when the female lead was declared to be strong and dominant--after careful pains were taken to develop the male lead as a clumsy oaf who only got what little success he had by family connections, blind luck, and latching onto the coattails of another. Call me cynical, but I don't need to see any more of this. (11-27-08)

Rob Roy (**: 20% read): like the beginning, but the story grew progressively more tiresome. Would recommend the first chapter to anyone interested in becoming a writer as it discusses numerous aspects of point of view. (12-28-08)

Rubies & Sapphires, Fred Ward (*****: 100% read): by a National Geographic field writer, the book is wonderful. Pretty much just like a NG article... only longer. 60 odd pages long (+/- 30,000 words) with a picture or two on every page: good reading--I read every word. Only thing I would have liked was an extra chapter at the end explaining how to differentiate (step by step)

real rubies from fakes. The character name Mogok comes from this book. It is the name of a ruby mine/field/region. (11-18-08)

Slapstick: A Novel, Kurt Vonnegut (*: 23% read, 243p 48,600w): stopped reading cold on page 56. Saw the writing (the author's process) too clearly. Using the staccato hyper-ADHD format akin to my own Schlock! I wonder if this book inspired that technique--unconsciously, so long ago (I probably read this in '85 or so). In the end, I stopped caring. The book moved too slow and I began to see the hinges where the author changed his mind, switched direction, or finally decided a particular that was heretofore unknown. Hi ho. (12-6-08)

Soul Surfer: A True Story of Faith, Family, and Fighting to Get Back on the Board, Bethany Hamilton with Sheryl Berk and Rick Bundschuh (**: 20% skip, 210pg/52,500wrds with 24pg of glossy bikini clad photos): a story of God, redemption, and lusting after a bikini wearing underage girl with only one arm (the other having been eaten by a shark). This, of course, is what the book is really about--empowering the disfigured, handicapped, and disabled. Good ole fashioned family values and praying for the return to that elusive thing called normalcy. (11-25-08)

There Will Be Blood, movie (***:100%, 158min): is a long convoluted movie that tried to cover too much ground. There is an atheist/preacher-man story thread along with a father/son plotline going on here. Either one of which would have made the fine basis for a movie, but both... dilute the other and make the whole less. The endings (for both plotlines) come out forced and take place 10-20 years after the bulk of the action. Unless this is based on a true story, it should have been tightened up. That being said, as I saw some of the scenes coming to fruition (especially in the atheist/preacher story arc), I was impressed and thought to myself, that's some really nice symbolism... but you know, too bad they didn't pull it off.

The Unofficial Guide to Disneyland 2003, Bob Schlinger (*****: 90% read, 275p 115,000w): excellent! Like taking a trip to Disneyland. Real fun to read. If time at the park is as precious as this book makes it out to be, the guide is a godsend. Best tip: arrive as the park opens, hit the busiest rides first (and I do mean first), then at noon head back to your hotel room for a nap, and around 3pm or so, return to the park and remain there till closing. The midday heat is going to fry you out and that's the most crowded time, so why kill yourself? Instead, wait it out in air-conditioned comfort. (12-5-08)

Vanity Fair, November 2008 (**: 100% page through, 250p 125,000w not that I read any): Playboy without the nudes. Personally, I couldn't find the will to care about any of the stories, and the "smart," fluff bits, just bored me. Still, good to page through. (12-5-08)

Walt Disney's 101 Dalmatians, picture book (****: 100% read, 25pg/500wrd): a delightful children's story. Nothing really critical to say. The good guys win and everyone lives happily ever after. The pictures make the book. (11-20-08)

Would the Buddha Wear a Walkman? A Catalogue of Revolutionary Tools for Higher Consciousness (*: 5% skim, 240p 180,000w): complete waste of time. Moldy, passé, and outdated. At ten minutes spent way too much time with it. (11-28-08).

Writing Down the Bones, Natalie Goldberg (*: 20% skim): if you don't know how to put pen to paper, this book may be of help, but if you can sit down and write, just write, I mean just write whatever old nonsense comes into your head no matter how stupid, trivial, or idiotic it may seem, then you don't need this book. Her advice boils down to writing train of thought without editing anything out, and if you do, like her, after a few decades you'll

have a stack of notebooks five feet tall... totally full of crap. She says the book took her a year and a half to write. Wow! That long? Attention publishers of the world, I can pump this shit out left and right. At 70 odd chapters of 1,000 words each, I could spit out a volume of this trash out every three months without even breaking into a sweat. Crap, shit, trash: I think that says it all. (161 words, far too many for this dung) (11-17-08)

You Gotta Have WA, Robert Whiting (*****: 10% skim, 340p/136,000w): an endless series of super-interesting anecdotes chronicling the history of Gaijin (foreigners) in Japanese baseball. Impossible to skim. Even though I wanted to page through it fast (that was my intent), I kept on getting sucked back into the stories. Finally, I just had to put the book down and walk away. I just don't care about baseball that much. But the writing... Superb! (11-27-08)

{I'm not reading books these days. A year or so ago, I'd go to the library once (or twice) a day, returning a book or two and checking out the same. It was good for a walk. And I typically don't spend that much time with a book. For instance, I like to quick-read skim tween girl romances. At a 5% skim rate, all the plot that ever was there is still contained, while the sexual allusions sort of rise to the surface. Pay my way to a book signing, whatever, web page signing, and maybe I'll do a live demonstration... hopefully I won't crash and burn. Anyhow, I used to go through books like I now cruise through websites... ten, twenty, fifty, a hundred an hour...}

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