<u>*MEMORANDUM*</u>

To: Budding Screenwriters and Serious Film Buffs

From: Lloyd Lim

Re: Screenwriting tool/film analysis book (45 pages)

*This book was designed as a way to revisit our cinematic past in order to **assist in developing content** for future film productions and broadening the base of possible writers. But this book can be also used merely to remember with fondness part of the road traveled by Hollywood (and its British counterparts). Part One discusses the basic elements of film to make sure that readers who are not in the film business have the minimum foundation needed to know how the medium works. Part Two presents a new taxonomy of films, not by standard genre, but by story substance. Part Three is an analysis of the stories of selected films that I admire for one reason or the other. Part Four is called "Nickel and Diming for Fun" and it is my opportunity to do a little hit and run on a few ancillary issues. Part Five presents my final observations. The appendix provides a series of partial lists that will help people navigate the vast history of film with a sense of relevance, albeit my sense of relevance. Again, the scope of coverage is American and British film and I do not claim to have seen every single film ever made. Before we begin, I issue a warning that not all of the films I discuss are suitable for children or for those who are easily offended. I didn't make these films and I am not endorsing them as a moral code. Remember the song? That's Entertainment!*

CONTENT IS KING: MINING THE TREASURE TROVE OF OLD FILMS

By Lloyd Lim, final draft (v. 8) dated March 1, 2018

Introduction

There's a certain kind of person that sees music and the arts as peripheral, a bit of entertainment for people with "real" jobs to enjoy, consumption, and nothing much more. I never saw it that way. I think of music and the arts in the way that the Renaissance did, as "holding the mirror up to Nature," a reflection of ourselves and our world that is the product and artifact of the moment in history in which it is created. By definition, the arts and music are part of our culture. Why does culture matter? Anthropologist Gillian Tett put it this way: "Culture matters too. The way that people organize institutions, define social networks, and classify the world has a crucial impact on how the government, business and the economy function (or sometimes do not function). Gillian Tett, *The Silo Effect: the Peril of Expertise and the Power of Breaking Down Barriers* (Simon and Shuster 2015), page xii. Music and the arts communicate values, and become the topic of our discussions of values, a kind of synergistic and interactive shaping of ourselves. It also creates shared experience and that can lead to a

greater sense of community. The fact that I watched *Star Trek* as a kid made it a lot easier for me to relate to people from other parts of the country that had also watched *StarTrek* as kids. Film in particular is a special kind of art because it is the true realization of Richard Wagner's dream of a total artwork or *Gestamkunstwerk*. By that he meant a work art that was a fusion of many different types of art. Because film is often aspirational in depicting our heroes, or images of the people who we would like to be, it tells us something about who we are inside ourselves, even if we fall short in real life. My goal in writing this book is to catalogue a segment of Americana and in doing so tell a story about what it means to be an American. History is important in providing context for our present and future actions and we cannot fully understand history without understanding cultural history.

I'm going to come at this from a particular perspective so that I also achieve a practical goal. The proliferation of myriad venues by which one can find films, including movie theaters, cable television, live streaming on computers and smart phones, has created a massive commercial demand content. But it is not that easy to come up with film with good content, the core of which resides in the screenplay, when so much has been done in film before. If you think otherwise, try your own hand at it! My working hypothesis is that by looking back into films, some famous and some mostly forgotten, we can find principles that will guide future writers of screenplays in developing terrific content that will dazzle audience at the same time that it makes great money for the writer and those who go on to make the movie. But there have always been fine production people in Hollywood and there is nothing sadder than seeing those people try to make something out of a bad screenplay. Try as they might, they can't put silk on a sow's ear.

It is worth noting that a screenplay will go through a lot of development even before any footage is shot and even after shooting begins, tinkering can occur simply because what appears effective on the page may not work when you go to actually do it and/or say it. Movies are a collaboration, after all. One of the good things about writing a screenplay, as opposed to a novel, is that if your language "style" isn't conducive to becoming a "great" writer, a screenplay is less demanding in that regard. For example, I suspect that the general public is baffled by literature professors who like James Joyce, but it is mostly because his style of putting words together gives them a lot to talk about and write about. It has less to do with the entertainment value of his novels or even the psychological depth of his insights into humanity. *Finnegan's Wake* isn't exactly what I would call a "crowd-pleaser," but it is full of verbal pyrotechnics. Some successful screenplays are very simple, such as *The Ring*, which is essentially the story of a video chain letter. What about *Star Wars episode 4, A New Hope*? I thought of it as good versus evil. My mother dismissed it as just cops and robbers. George Lucas described the audience experience as like going to a football game. Simple, right? I mean, the bad guy (Darth Vader) not only wears a black hat, he's dressed entirely in black. At the other end of the spectrum, there are films with plots as complex as *L.A. Confidential* or films that are so complex it is hard to follow them, like the first *Mission Impossible* (Tom Cruise).

Like most mature industries in the modern world, Hollywood churns out a lot of standardized product. But films are sometimes most highly regarded when they are the most customized, the most idiosyncratic. We love the fact that some semi-neurotic writer and/or director made a quirky film that reflects their unique personalities. There is no one right way to be a fine filmmaker. Directors like Sergio Leone, Clint Eastwood, Stephen Frears and Werner Herzog are known for shooting quickly. Directors like Stanley Kubrick, Alfred Hitchcock, Michael Cimino and Stephen Spielberg are not. Director Richard Donner likes to use a lot of cameras to capture the action and decide later in the editing room. Werner Herzog likes to use fewer cameras and make decisions on set. One has to be truly and authentically oneself in order to produce unique, idiosyncratic, customized works of art. Just because a technique works for one filmmaker, doesn't mean that it will work for everyone else, or even anyone else.

There tends to be some confusion between "fame" and "quality." I don't respond to artists based on fame because I know that Bach was known mostly as an organist during his life and only long after his death was he so highly regarded as a composer. As an example, while I think Audrey Hepburn is one of the most beautiful and emotional actresses, I think Eleanor Parker is her equal in both respects, despite being significantly less famous. And who remembers Joan Greenwood? Well, I do because she was a beautiful and capable British actress who was in *Kind Hearts and Coronets* and *Tom Jones*. But not many others would. And what about the Academy Awards? *Tom Jones* won Best Picture in 1963, but the direction, editing and cinematography make it look like a chopped lettuce salad.   In 1967, the rather silly musical *Oliver!* beat out the admittedly talky, play-like film *The Lion In Winter* which is nonetheless one of the great expositions of marriage. In 1982, the dreadfully boring *Ghandi* beat out *ET: The Extraterrestrial, Tootsie* and *The Verdict,* presumably due to political correctness. In 1996, the slow-moving soap opera *The English Patient* beat out the brilliantly innovative *Fargo*. My joke at the time was that in order to like *The English Patient*, you had to *be* an English patient. Admittedly, sometimes a weak film wins because the entire field is weak, and one may take note of the fact that after the mid-2000's, the number of films that get nominated expands significantly. Everybody gets a trophy, more or less. But my main point is that a contemporary popularity contest isn't always a good way to judge a film. In fact, all art is subjective to some extent and our views will change as we change. When I was a teenager I watched John Huston's *The Night of the Iguana* on television and I found it rather depressing. But I watched it again a few days before the release of this book and in places I was laughing my damn fool head off.

Obviously, a commercial film is by definition a product for a mass audience. Presumably then, it helps to have one's finger on the pulse of society or the spirit of the times (zeitgeist). Robert H. Prechter's "socionomics" theory may conflate correlation and causation, but even given that, he makes a fair point that changes in the social mood affect what kinds of movies do well. In a speech to a gathering of futurists in Boston in 2010, Robert Prechter reiterated his observation that during positive social mood trends people tend to be attracted to films with positive themes and those that have heroes and villains with distinct, white-vs.-black moral codes.

During negative social mood trends, people tend to be attracted to films with negative themes and protagonists who have ambiguous moral qualities." See Mark Galasiewiski and Chuck Thompson, "Ch. 10: Social Mood and James Bond Film Ratings,"Socionomic Studies of Society and Culture (Socionomics Institute Press 2017) pages 122-123. This means that as a writer you have to have a bit of luck, because only a select few are men or women for their times. It is not just a matter of talent; it is partly a matter of timing.

Sometimes a film can seem to have all the ingredients, but still fail and the culprit is often the writing. A good example is *The Missouri Breaks* which starred two of the period's most famous actors (Jack Nicholson and Marlon Brando) and was directed by Arthur Penn (who directed *Bonnie and Clyde* and *The Chase*). It is a good film, but it fails to engage the audience because from start to finish, there isn't much reason to be sympathetic to any of the characters. In fact, none of them are even remotely likable. That may be realistic, but it makes for bad drama. Another example is *The Italian Job* (2003) with Mark Walhberg, Charlize Theron and Edward Norton. Lots of glitzy action and fine actors, but the characters are unlovable and motivated entirely by either greed or revenge. Watching the film is like eating empty calories. For me, it was *just plain tedious.*

Overly serious films can also be a problem. Tom Hulce played Stalin's film projectionist in the movie *The Inner Circle*, which was about how Stalin gave him that job so he could turn his wife into one of his mistresses. It was a decent film, but a real "Debbie Downer." And what is the moral of the story? That you have to watch out for evil communist dictators with a streak of paranoia and vindictiveness when you have a pretty wife? Duh! I had empathy for the character played by Hulce and the film is realistic about how life can be cruel, but this film reminded me of a nine year old boy who is pulling the snot out of his nose and examining it. It doesn't work as entertainment. *Midnight Express* and *Brokedown Palace* were two other films that were less than entirely fun to watch. That shouldn't be too surprising when you write a screenplay about people being abused in prison. *Schindler's List* is a film on a dark topic that worked commercially, perhaps not as entertainment, but as drama because it wasn't just a story about being a victim. It also told the story of the character development and moral journey of Oscar Schindler. Some saw this as sugar coating the Holocaust, but without the sugar, it won't sell widely.

Given my belief in the importance of screenwriting to the success of any film, and the keen demand for content we see in the market today, **stories** will be our focus as opposed to, say, camera setups or lighting.

PART ONE:

THE BASIC ELEMENTS OF FILMMAKING

A study of film technique theory begins with the views of Russian filmmakers Sergei Eisenstein and Vsevolod Pudovkin. Eisenstein believed that film involved juxtaposing conflicting images. Pudovkin believed that film involved using images as building blocks. I think of these as the same ideas, but with a different emphasis. The benefit of Eisenstein's formulation is to give maximum freedom to the director in putting one *image* after the other. The benefit of Pudovkin's formulation is to remind us that we are telling a story and that the images that follow one another are building that story. Stanley Kubrick added the gloss that film was more like music than a novel in that it was more temporal, but I'm not sure this observation is very useful to a screenwriter. Conversely, composer Hans Zimmer's observation that "not all information is dialogue" is hugely insightful and important for screenwriters to understand. See Hans Zimmer*, Film Scoring*, masterclass.com. I like this insight so much, that I'll say it again with emphasis: *with film, not all information is dialogue*.

Although I have just debunked the idea of a bright line between Eisenstein and Pudovkin, it might be fair to say that *Star Wars* and *Cinema Paradisio* are more Eisenstein, whereas *The Grapes of Wrath* and *2001: A Space Odyssey* are more Pudovkin. But all these films contain elements that might be considered the progeny of both Russian filmmakers.

We need to know the difference between expanded time and **compressed time**. A director can expand the time it takes to show an event such as depicting a person opening the door and sequencing various shots of the hand reaching for the doorknob, the face of the person reaching, the doorknob itself, the door opening. Brian DePalma uses this technique nearly to excess in the movies *Dressed to Kill* and *Blow Out*. But the more important concept in film is compressed time, which means that a director or screenwriter can jump from a brief depiction of one event to a brief depiction of another and edit out all the time that in real life would have elapsed between those two events. Why is this important to film? Because without it, you don't have a movie that is short enough to sit through or which is not utterly boring to watch. Film lives in compressed time; compressed time is as much part of shaping the point of view of the audience as the framing and angle of the camera shot. Film is edited reality and that is a big part of what gives film its meaning. It is capturing moments and putting them together to create a point of view. But because we only see short segments strung together, the audience can sense that behind those pieces is a larger reality. They can fill in the blanks based on who they are at that moment and that makes the movie even more subjective than it might initially appear. A good example of a film that covers an epic time frame, but which paces through quickly because of the fine use of compressed time is *Mary Queen of Scots (1971).*

Many screenplays have started as novels. Some novels are better suited for film than others, however. Some novels are too long to be adapted for film. Anthony Burgess' novel *A Clockwork Orange* is short, but the film is still over two hours long.   Also, because film is made up of

visual images, a novel that is too focused on what is going on inside the characters' heads or hearts can be problematic to adapt for film. For example, the film industry had trouble making films out of Frank Herbert's *Dune* and Stephen King's *The Shining* despite two efforts on each novel. Frank Herbert's novel is full of fascinating politics and sociology, but those ideas are completely lost in David Lynch's 1984 film version. When I watch that film, I almost feel as if Lynch shot the first part of the novel with due seriousness, but started to run out of money and had to give short shrift to the rest. Stephen King's novel is mostly an internal psychological and emotional meditation fraught with subjectivity that does not lend itself to a visual, action-oriented film. Note that just because a novel is bad, doesn't mean that it will make a bad movie. The novels "Ghost Story" by Peter Straub and "The Relic" by Douglas Preston and Lincoln Child were clumsily written, but they made for decent films.

Sometimes plays are made into films, but this can cause problems because plays are "talking heads" and may offer very little action or change of scene. Films of plays like *Equus*, *The Caine Mutiny Court Martial* and *Breaker Morant* are examples of good films that are a bit boring because they seem too much like films of plays. The films of Tennessee Williams' plays *A Streetcar Named Desire*, *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* and *Night of the Iguana* are okay if you like to watch characters who are blabbermouths. Conversely, *Forbidden Planet* is an example of a play (Shakespeare's 'The Tempest') that was adapted in a way that disguised the original and added enough action to turn it into a decent film.

Using models is fairly common. What is *Waterworld* other than *Mad Max/the Road Warrior* on the water?" What is *Outland*, but *High Noo*n in space? Isn't Ridley Scott's film *Alien* a fusion of the old Hammer film *The Mark of the Werewolf* and the sci-fi film *The Green Slime*? But the use of models in art isn't an aberration or outlier. For example, Shakespeare's play "The Merchant of Venice" used Christopher Marlowe's play "The Jew of Malta" as a basic framework to improve upon. Another example of modeling in film can be found if you work backwards from *Close Encounters of the Third Kind* to a film called *Rage* about an angry rancher played by George C. Scott who goes up against the government after they mistakenly drop nerve gas on him and his son and to the classic Hitchcock film *North by Northwest* and the ascent of Mount Rushmore and the view of James Mason's personal airstrip.   The 2017 remake of *The Saint* owed a lot to Tim Burton's *Batman* (1989) and the Tom Cruise *Mission Impossible* Films. And so forth and so forth.

The **director** matters, of course, because he or she is like the general in charge of the film army. I have a bit of a confession to make. As a young person, my favorite director was Stanley Kubrick. Now that I'm older I see things a bit differently. Kubrick is a genius, but his emotional distance and coolly analytical perspective often fail to engage my emotions. In addition, there is something about his OCD meticulousness and orderliness that makes his films seem somehow fake, too staged, too stylized, and that also makes it difficult for me to engage emotionally. Francois Truffaut put a joke about Kubrick into his final film, *Confidentially Yours* with Fanny Ardant, that "there aren't any women in his movies." That's a French perspective in

a way, but it is a trenchant point because there is more than just a whiff of the sexist and homophobe in Kubrick's work.   His last film, *Eyes Wide Shut*, has that problem, in addition to being pedantic. That said, I still like *Spartacus* and *Lolita* very much, even though (or perhaps because) these are the least quintessentially Kubrickian films.

One key thing for a producer to watch out for is that some directors can do action sequences and some can't. Stephen Spielberg and John McTiernan can handle action sequences no problem (see. e.g. *Jaws,* the *Indiana Jones* films*, Munich* and *Die Hard, Predator, The Hunt for Red October*). Other directors can't do action sequences for diddly (see e.g. *The Black Hole (1979)*, the car chase towards the end of *Just Cause*, and the ski chase from *The World Is Not Enough* (famous director, but clumsy action sequence).

The **director of photography**, also called known as the "DP" or the cinematographer, is crucial for creating the look of a film.   It is platitudinous and circular to say so, but given that film is about what you see, what you see matters a lot. As an example, in *Barry Lyndon*, I would argue that the cinematography is the most important character, thanks both to DP John Alcott and Stanley Kubrick who began his career as a photojournalist.   Younger readers should please remember that modern technology can photograph in almost any light, but in the old days, this was not the case. Alcott was a pioneer of photography with existing light. Another personal favorite of mine was the work done by DP William A. Fraker on *1941*. He really captures a California sense of place with the blue skies, dusty brown earth and white houses with white picket fences. In addition, the film is set during the Christmas season and you really feel it.

While on the topic of DPs, I want to make a comment about a moving camera (as distinguished from the more common camera fixed on a tripod that pans left or right). The first moving camera shot that I know was a short dolly-in shot of the heroine in Fritz Lang's *Metropoli*s (1927). James Whale was a pioneer in terms of the liberal use of the moving camera in *Frankenstein* (1931). Orson Welles loved moving camera shots and they were also used in a somewhat irritating way by director John Guillerman and DP Douglas Slocombe in *The Blue Max*. The invention of the Stedicam enabled some excessive camera movement by director Stanley Kubrick and DP John Alcott in *The Shining*. That said, who can fail to fall in love with Martin Scorsese's moving camera shot in the bar in *Goodfellas*? But modern technology has enabled almost any camera movement and sometimes we see a promiscuous use of a moving camera. Now, I like a moving camera as well as the next person, but there is also an important place for a traditional fixed tripod type of camera shot with good framing composition and a lot of meticulous care in positioning the actors. Check out DP James Wong Howe's work in *Hud*, or DP Vilmos Zsigmond's work in *The Deer Hunter* as examples.   There is no hard and fast rule about it, but directors should recognize that when the camera is moving, you tend to lose a bit on the composition side. Not that composition always needs be perfect, you understand. I could never get comfortable with Barry Levinson's tendency to seek perfect composition in films like *The Young Sherlock Holmes* and *Bugsy*. Stephen Spielberg doesn't always go for a perfect composition, and my personal opinion as to why it is that he doesn't want to call our

attention to the fact that we are watching a movie. But even without perfect framing composition, Spielberg sets up shots better and with greater natural talent than almost any director in film history, with the possible exception of Federico Fellini.

Also crucial to the look of a film is the **production designer**. Some of the great production designers were Ken Adam, who designed the early *James Bond* films and *Barry Lyndon* and Ralph McQuarrie, who did the original sketches and paintings for *Star Wars: A New Hope*.   Luc Besson's films *The Fifth Element* and *Valerian and the City of a Thousand Planets* are great design films, as was Mike Hodges' campy film *Flash Gordon (1980)*. Check out Barbara Ling's colorful design work on *Batman Forever*. And who can forget H.R. Giger's design work on *Alie*n or Lawrence G. Paul's work on *Bladerunner*? And without production designer Mario Garbuglia, *Barbarella* would not be worth watching.   Also worth mentioning are Peter Ellenshaw, who did the matte paintings for Disney's live action films like *In Search of the Castaways* and *Mary Poppins,* and his son Harrison Ellenshaw, who did the matte paintings for *Star Wars* and *The Empire Strikes Back*. They worked together on *The Black Hole (1979)* which had perhaps the most beautiful, if impractical, spacecraft in film history. With CGI, matte painting is now a lost art, but the Ellenshaws sure had a keen eye.

The **editor** is extremely important to keeping the film moving along, although you cannot expect an editor to fix a slow moving screenplay. There is a classic example of the importance of an editor in the comparison between the original edit by Michael Kahn of *Close Encounters of the Third Kind* and the subsequent revisions by Steven Spielberg in the special edition and the director's cut. Editor Michael Kahn sequences many of the early scenes around the five note alien theme—as we see the transition from the Hindus singing in India to the tape of them being replayed by the Air Force to the radar playing the theme into space and then Francois Truffaut as Lacombe playing theme on an electronic keyboard to the young boy playing the theme on the xylophone. And my favorite transition was from the light from the helicopter at night that blows the townspeople off the hill while they're waiting for UFOs to the brightly lit scenes of India. The original transitions from scene to scene were very strong and should not have been disturbed, with great respect to Mr. Spielberg. There are two hugely famous edits (cuts) in film history. The first is from Lawrence of Arabia when the close up shot of Peter O'Toole blowing out a match is followed by an extreme long shot of the sun blazing down on the Arabian dessert. The second is from *2001: A Space Odyssey*, when the rising and falling bone that the man-ape throws up in the air is followed by a shot of a spacecraft floating in orbit around the Earth. Probably the film's directors had as much to do with those edits as the editor (or screenwriter). It is worth noting that quick editing of relatively short duration shots began in earnest in the 1970's with *Jaws* and *Star Wars*, although certainly the shower scene in *Psycho* is an even earlier example of the technique. *Cinema Paradisio* is a good example of a film that paces quickly and is easy to watch, despite being entirely talking and drama, because the editor (Mario Morra) and the director (Guiseppe Tornatore) use quick editing and a multiplicity of shots.

As stated before, to me the **screenwriter** is the critical element for any film to be successful. As we move into the analysis of individual films, focusing on the screenplay, our old friends from high school English class will come back to mind: plot, character, dialogue, theme. These old ideas haven't changed and probably will not change in the foreseeable future because they reflect what human beings find interesting in stories. In addition, author and teacher of writing John Gardiner said that "Fiction seeks out truth…. The writer who can't distinguish truth from a peanut-butter sandwich can never be a good writer." John Gardner, *The Art of Fiction: Notes on Craft for Young Writers* (Vintage1982) page 79. And as Professor James Hynes has aptly observed, all stories have a character, a conflict and a resolution of that conflict. James Hynes, *Writing Great Fiction: Storytelling Tips and Techniques* (audio course: The Great Courses 2014). Syd Field talks about the importance of having an "incident" that the characters react to. Syd Field, *Screenplay: The Foundations of Screenwriting* (Delta 2005), p. 44. That is taking the same issue from the other side of the fence. Field is worth reading because he does a very good job of explaining why a screenplay is not the same thing as a novel or a play because it is more visual. That distinction is crucial. For a professor of literature, the style of the language in a novel is very important, but film is a different medium entirely in which language is merely a subsidiary element of the larger whole. You might have noticed that almost all professors of literature are not also writers of great novels and the main reason is that they cannot write with the right style of language. That's not a criticism. Many people write a kind of business or technical prose that just doesn't lend itself to fiction or poetry. This is the Age of Science and the Age of Reason is already under our belts. Writing with great latitude/freedom just isn't as easy as it once was.

That also triggers a teachable moment on point of view. One of the flaws of Francis Ford Coppola's screenplay for *The Great Gatsby* (Robert Redford version from 1974) was that it is not told from his perspective, but from the perspective of the aristocratic world that he seeks to join. We don't even see Gatsby for quite some time after the film begins and in one of the goofiest missteps in screenwriting history, it doesn't become clear that Gatsby and Daisy had a prior relationship until quite some time after we see them meet. I realize that Coppola was trying to be true to F. Scott Fitzgerald's novel, but therein lies the problem. We don't read Fitzgerald's novel because of the gripping plot or the depth of the characters. We read it because of the style of writing and the atmospherics of the period that is evoked. In a film, language matters a lot less and, a different approach was needed. In addition, in the novel we see Gatsby through the eyes of the narrator Nick and because they have some things in common, we infer things about Gatsby's desire to climb the social ladder from our look inside Nick's head. In a film, you can't get inside anyone's head even with a bit of clumsy narration. Without the point of view created by being inside Nick's head, it is a lot harder to care about Gatsby. In fact, it is not clear why we even need a character like Nick in a film about a "Great Gatsby."   What is more insulting, we the audience are forced to watch the film continue on for some time after Gatsby dies. What in the book is mere pages, a sketch really, the ending in the film is a prolonged and tedious mediation on someone we never really knew in the first place.

As to the class of aristocrats that are depicted in the film, they are not very likable and they come from a part of history that many people are glad to have put behind us.   As a result, I watch the film and say "who cares?" Anyway, the funniest part of this film for me is that in the opening credits where the camera is surveying inanimate objects on a table and in a scene in front of Bruce Dern's mansion, a fly enters the frame and, in the first instance, alights on an object, and in the second instance, forces Bruce Dern to wave it off. Now, I respect a director that shoots fast and keeps on moving forward, but you can't make a gauzy lensed, brightly lit movie about a glittering age of aristocracy with flies coming in and out of frame. Or maybe I'm wrong about that. Maybe you *must* have flies.

Plot (which some think includes the setting) is very important in film because we can't see inside the heads and hearts of the characters other than through action and dialogue (discounting narration which is partly a cop out) and these cannot be developed properly unless there is a plot. I personally like a fast start to a film such as *Star Wars* which gets going in 4 shots and *Jaws* which starts with one of the most frightening death scenes in movie history and puts the hook all the way in. Also notable is the opening song for the Disney cartoon *Beauty and the Beast*, where by the final notes of that song we are already seeing entirely through Belle's eyes. Pacing is important and I have already mentioned *Mary Queen of Scots* as a positive example. An example of a plot that dragged just a bit is *The Blue Max*.

Aristotle had three "unities" for dramatic plays: time, place and character. Films are a different medium than plays, but Aristotle's unities can still be helpful in avoiding causing undue confusion for the audience. One of the great achievements in plotting that shows no respect for temporal order and has the audience jumping back and forth through time in almost every scene is Fred Zinneman's *Julia* by Alvin Sargent based on Lillian Hellman's memoir "Pentimento." Conversely, one of the great disasters resulting from a disrespect for temporal order is Stanley Donen's *Two for the Road*, by Frederic Raphael, which is an okay film with great acting but shows that if you're going to jump around in time, you have to go all the way and do it often enough so that the audience isn't surprised by it, as *Julia* does, not once in a blue moon the way *Two for the Road* does.   John L. Mankiewicz's *The Barefoot Contessa* with Ava Gardner jumps around in time quite a bit also and also has the unfortunate aspect of multiple narrators. The reason seems to have been that Mankiewicz couldn't tell a lifetime length story without changing the people that were observing her. The problem that I had was that I couldn't easily tell the difference between the sound of one narrator's voice and another. Now, these are all innovative, courageous films, don't get me wrong about that.

Obviously, **character** is revealed partly by actions and partly by dialogue, but almost always in the context of some kind of conflict between multiple characters. A great conflict in a recent film was the *Star Trek* reboot by J.J. Abrams who depicted a role reversal between Spock and Kirk where Spock was the captain and Kirk was the first officer and they had to struggle to become captain. James Scott Bell uses the word "confrontation" instead of "conflict". James Scott Bell, *Plot & Structure* (Writer's Digest Books 2004), p. 10. Aaron Sorkin uses the word

"obstacle," which obviously fosters conflict or confrontation. Aaron Sorkin, *Screenwriting* (masterclass.com 2017). The characters must have a goal, objective (Bell), motivation, intentionality (Sorkin). Then they bump up against each other like marbles. You get the idea, it couldn't be simpler from a conceptual standpoint. But from the perspective of implementation, writing a plot with compelling characters is easier said than done.

A key issue about character is whether the character will stay the same throughout the film or undergo a development/change as the film progresses. The latter is harder to do and is relatively rare in film, but a good recent example was the heroine in *Rogue One* by Lawrence Kasdan, J.J. Abrams and Michael Arndt. She becomes a hero only reluctantly and quite late in the film.

The best characters are complex. As an example, Richard Burton made a career of playing macho men who were also at times self-pitying and fearful. Consider his Mark Anthony in *Cleopatr*a, his Alex Leamas in *The Spy Who Came in From the Cold,* his fallen priest in *Night of the Iguana*, his George in *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf*? Consider Albert Finney's Sir in *The Dresser* who is both a talented artist and inspiring leader at the same time that he is a selfish and sadistic narcissist. Villains can also be complex. Consider Dennis Hopper's Frank Booth in *Blue Velvet*, an angry, psychotic sadist who is also something of a self-pitying crybaby with an over-sensitivity to love songs. Or consider Malcom McDowell's Dr. Zorin in *Star Trek: Generations*, a selfish, unempathetic villain willing to kill on a planetary scale, but whose evil was born of his deep love for his wife and children. Complex characters are more interesting for the audience and that has something to do with the fact that they are also more interesting for the actor to play. These elements have to be preconceived by the writer and built into the story. Adding depth to the character may increase the audience's sense that what they are watching is real and truthful because people tend to be complex (although some more than others) and where there is great good there is also often the potential for great evil.

On the issue of character also observe the dramatic problem presented by an invincible character like Superman. How worried can we get about someone like that? Almost all films have the problem that the audience expects the hero to survive to the end of the film, even if they don't always expect him or her to win. There is the willing suspension of disbelief, but that can only go so far. It is a baffling phenomenon that real people can come to care about fictitious people, but much of any success with that rests in the skill of the writers. This problem is solved *by Superman: The Movie* by making the audience worry about saving the millions of people in California and New Jersey and, more importantly, because the true spine of the story is really about how Superman is quietly looking out for Lois Lane and saves her from a horrible death three times. In other words, it's a love story, but made more compelling because only Clark Kent admits that he likes Lois Lane, while Superman does not.

Dialogue should generally either advance the plot or enlighten us about the characters. I say "generally" because sticking only to words that advance the action can make the film seem unrealistic because in real life people banter off the topic. *Survivor* (2015) with Mila Jovovich

and Pierce Brosnan is a decent (if pedestrian), visually professional, spy film, but the dialogue sounds too much like exactly what someone might conventionally expect that character to say in a spy film. Do real spies always talk like spies? I doubt it. A good spy is someone you would never know had that job. And why would people always be sure of things? Why wouldn't they speculate and say "maybe" or put things in the form of a question? I almost felt at times that cutting back further on the dialogue and just having the actors act without speaking would have helped the credibility of the film. Because the camerawork and editing were good. David Mamet, who is one of the modern masters of dialogue, argues that when people speak, they are trying to get something from someone else, so the question is—what is that something? See David Mamet, *Dramatic Writing*, masterclass.com. I don't know if that is always true in real life, but it is probably almost always true in drama because drama needs to be far more efficient than life is.

Dialogue is a back and forth, not unlike playing tennis. So, in general, hit the ball back over the net--and quickly. Many lines of dialogue are only a few words and sentence fragments are not uncommon. Try to avoid the long speech made by the priest played by Gene Hackman in *The Posideon Adventure* at the end when he's trying to shut off the steam valve. Try to avoid the dissertations on chaos theory made by the scientist played by Jeff Goldblum in *Jurassic Park*. The novel by Michael Crichton had page length soliloquys of cribbed and distorted chaos theory. It was the hot material of the day thanks to Benoit Mandelbrot and his work on fractals. But they overdid it. A little bit thrown in here and there as seasoning would have been interesting. As it was, it sounded like a kid saying "I know something you don't know" over and over again. I found it annoying and disturbing of my willing suspension of disbelief.

What's the toughest thing about writing dialogue? The toughest thing is to differentiate the sound and feel of the words one character uses from another. This is difficult because the tendency for any one writer will be to write dialogue for every character that sounds very much the way the writer would speak. When the dialogue spoken by different people sounds the same, however, it could be a symptom of the fact that there isn't any real difference between the characters in the movie and that in turn is a function of the fact that there isn't any depth in the characterizations. What might happen then? The audience may not be able to engage their emotions—they just don't care about the people they are watching on the screen because they seem entirely phony. An example of that for me was the 2003 remake of *The Italian Job*, which had plenty of action, but none of which mattered not at all to me because I had no reason to care about the characters. They were talking, but not about anything that I found interesting. It was blather. Conversely, *The Alam*o is a great example of character differentiation. John Wayne's Daniel Boone, Richard Widmark's Jim Bowie and Lawrence Harvey's William Travis could not be more different and these conflicting energies are what drive most of the first half of the film. It is inherently interesting to watch very different people try to work together as a team.

Again, and with emphasis, it is NOT the case that everything we know about people comes from what they say. Talk is cheap. We learn the most about people from what they do. So be subtle enough not to rely exclusively on dialogue to define the characters in your screenplay. A very strong film is *The Road Warrior*, in which Mel Gibson has so few lines that his performance is almost like one you would see in a silent film. But it does depend on the actor. Marlon Brando and Peter O'Toole are interesting to watch even when they're not speaking. Some actors are boring even when they are talking up a storm.

A writer must have, or try to develop, a good ear for dialogue. We will do as many examples of *memorable* dialogue as there are letters in the alphabet, plus two. Not all dialogue should be memorable and, as Lew Hunter points out (following William Faulkner's line about "your darlings"), you must be ruthless about lines that are precious to you but don't fit. Lew Hunter, *Lew Hunter's Screenwriting 424*, page 80. That said, now and then it can be nice to have phrase or two that the audience will enjoy enough to take home with them. Here are the examples: (a) *A Few Good Men* by Aaron Sorkin (Should we or should we not take the advice of the galactically stupid?); (b) *Star Wars* by George Lucas (*Luke:* Ben is a great man. *Han Solo:* Yeah, great at getting us into trouble.); (c) *Jaws* by Peter Benchley and Carl Gottlieb (*Quint*: I value my neck a lot more than three thousand bucks, chief. I'll find him for three, but I'll catch him and kill him for ten. Ten thousand for me by myself. For that you get the head, the tail, the whole damn thing.); (d) *Dirty Harry* by H.J. Fink, R.M. Fink and Dean Reisner (*Harry:* But being that this is a .44 magnum, the most powerful handgun in the world and would blow your head clean off, you gotta ask yourself a question—do I feel lucky? Well, do you, punk?); (e) *King Kong* by Lorenzo Semple, Jr. (*Gas company executive*: Let's not get eaten alive on this island. Bring the mosquito spray!); (f) *The Godfather Part 2* by Francis Ford Coppola and Mario Puzo (*Michael Corleon*e: My offer is this—nothing, not even the fee for the gaming license—which I would appreciate if you would put up personally.); (g) *The Towering Inferno* by Stirling Silliphant (*Architect:* What do they call it when you kill people?); (h) *Superman: The Movie* by Mario Puzo, David Newman, Leslie Newman and Robert Benton (*Lex Luthor*: Why is the greatest criminal mind of our time surrounding himself with total nincompoops?); (i) *Ordinary People* by Alvin Sargent (*Calvin/husband:* You are beautiful. And you are unpredictable. But you're so cautious. You're determined, Beth, but you know something? You're not strong.); (j) *Apocalypse Now* by John Milius and Francis Ford Coppola (*Col. Kilgore*: I love the smell of napalm in the morning!), (k) *Ghostbusters* by Harold Ramis and Dan Akroyd (*Louis Tully/CPA:* "Many Shubs and Zulls knew what it was to be roasted in the depths of a Sloar that day, I can tell you.); (l) *The Empire Strikes Back* by Lawrence Kasdan and Leigh Brackett (*Yoda:* Judge you me by my size? And well you should not. For the Force is my ally and a powerful ally it is); (m) *Working Girl* by Kevin Wade (*Tess McGill*: I've got a head made for business and a body made for sin); (n) *Unforgive*n by David Webb Peoples (*Munny:* It's a helluva thing to kill a man. You take away everything he's got --and everything he's ever gonna have.); (o) *Forrest Gump* by Eric Roth (*Forrest*: But Lieutenant Dan, you don't have any legs*! Lt. Dan*: Yes, Gump, I know that.); (p) *The Alamo* by James Edward Grant (*Davey Crockett*: There's right and there's wrong. You

gotta do one or the other. Do the other and you may be walking around, but you're dead as a beaver hat), (q) *The Exorcist* by William Peter Blatty (*Satan/image of the mother of Father Damien:* Dami, Dami, why you do this to me? *Reply of Father Damien:* You're not my mother!); (r) *The Island of Dr. Moreau* (1996) by Richard Stanley and Ron Hutchinson (*Douglas:* You all killed the Father. You all ate his flesh. So who is the new Father? Who is God number one? Who should they obey? Him? Or him? You see, there must be a God number one.); (s) *Iron Man* by Mark Fergus, Hank Ostby, Art Marcum and Matt Holloway (*Iron Monger/Jeff Bridges*: I'm thoroughly enjoying the suit!); (t) *Unforgiven* by David Webb Peoples (*Wild Bill*: This guy here is the Duck of Death. *Beauchamp*: Duke. *Wild Bill:* Duck, I say.); (u) *Videodrome* by David Cronenberg (*Masha*: Because it has something that you don't have, Max. It has a philosophy. And that's what makes it dangerous); (u) *Three Days of the Condor* by Lorenzo Semple, Jr. and David Rayfiel (*CIA operative*: It's simple economics. Today it's oil, right? Tomorrow it's food. Plutonium. Maybe even sooner. Now what do you think the people are gonna want us to do then?); (v) *Scarface* by Oliver Stone (*Tony Montana*: Say hello to my little friend!); (w) *The Wind and the Lion* by John Milius (*Rasuli*: I, like the lion, must remain in my place. While you, like the wind, will never know yours.); (x) *Die Hard* by Jeb Stuart and Steven E. deSouza (*Hans Gruber:* You ask for miracles, Theo, I give you the F.B.I.); (y*) Star Trek: the Undiscovered Country* by Nicholas Meyer and Denny Martin Flinn (*General Chang:* You have never experienced Shakespeare until you have read him in the original Klingon.); (z) *North by Northwest* by Ernest Lehman (Cary Grant to Eva Marie Saint: You could tease a man to death without half trying. So stop trying.); (aa) *Network* by Paddy Chayefsky (CEO Howard Jensen: The world is a corporation.); (bb) *The Hunt for Red October* by Larry Ferguson and Donald Stewart (*Mr. Pelt*: Mr. Ryan, I'm a politician, which means that I'm a liar and a cheat and when I'm not kissing babies, I'm stealing their lollipops. But it also means that I keep my options open."). Also very notable is the gangland slang from *Miller's Crossing* by the Cohen Brothers. Instead of saying "she's a whore" or "she's a slut", John Turturro says "She's a sick twist." Instead of saying, "He's always putting me down" or "He's always insulting me", Jon Polito says "He's always giving me the high hat." Using a terminology different from the norm takes some brainpower. For his book *A Clockwork Orange*, Anthony Burgess created a new slang out of a mixture of Russian and English which was retained for the film, at least partly. And for *Blade Runner*, the "gutter speak" used by the detective Gaff (Edward James Olmos) was a hybrid of multiple languages.

Actors matter, of course. Some of our remakes tell the story. Replacing Gregory Peck with Liev Schreiber in *The Omen*, Robert Redford with Leonardo DiCaprio in *The Great Gatsby*, and Michael Rennie with Keanu Reeves in *The Day the Earth Stood Still* are emblematic of our current problems running a movie industry without a studio system to build the talent that supports it. It's not that the replacements can't act, it's that they're not quite the same stature as personages. Maybe Hollywood just doesn't naturally attract the kinds of characters that it used to. There was a time when a fairly straight-laced fellow like Ronald Reagan could go to

Hollywood and become president of the Screen Actors Guild. Would he even consider going to Hollywood today? I'm not so sure.

In casting actors, beware of the danger that a virtuoso actor can become a parody of himself (or herself). Marlon Brando, Jack Nicholson, Al Pacino, Jon Voight and Lawrence Olivier may be great actors, but if you watch them in *The Island of Dr. Moreau, The Shining, Scent of a Woman, Anaconda* and *Dracula* (respectively), you may find that they go a little over the top. Self-parody may be fun and "sophisticated," but it has a tendency to harm the willing suspension of disbelief. In addition, note that actors who are used to acting on stage may not fully recognize that the movie camera is much closer than a stage audience would be and that the performance needs to be toned down.

 A word about **genius**. If you're not one, reading this book isn't going to turn you into one, although it may help point you in the direction of closing the gap. Even so, it is important to recognize genius when it exists if for no other reason than to measure yourself against it (typically the comparison isn't favorable). Let us focus first on novels. Two works of genius are H.G. Wells' *Tono-Bungay* and Peter Hoeg's *Smilla's Sense of Snow*. Why? Because in both cases, the author's mind makes connections between ideas that are not naturally related into a coherent whole. The process is not knitting together separate pieces of cloth. The process is organic. The brain collects information over time and then, probably partly in ways unknown to the author and partly due to some hard thinking and research, the brain gives birth to a live baby which is a synthesis and hybrid taken from what came before. This organic synthesis is what is hard to duplicate. That's why you look at these novels and you can't figure out how the author came up with it. Same thing with Bach, Shakespeare and Rembrant. Even when their technique is at its simplest, you can't figure how they did it. They make it look simple but for the average person, it is an impossibility.

Now, that is not to say that one has to be a genius to write a good screenplay. If that were true, there would be ten films in all of American film history. In real life, no screenplay makes it to the screen without some additional work by others. Director Stephen Spielberg had a big influence on the screenplay for *Jaws* and the famous soliloquy by Quint about the USS Indianapolis was heavily reworked by Robert Shaw himself. *Superman: The Movie* was written as a comedy by Mario Puzo (author of *The Godfather*), but director Richard Donner didn't think that approach was right for an iconic American superhero. The famous line from *The Empire Strikes Back* when Han Solo is close to being put into the carbon freezing unit and Princess Leia says "I love you," and he says "I know," was ad-libbed by Harrison Ford. Screenwriters should prepare to be adjusted.

Focus Question: Do Themes Matter?

In talking about theme, I want to start with a few episodes from *The Twilight Zone* and *Star Trek* television shows. A shorter film that can fit in a 30 or 60 minute time slot including

commercials can advance thematic material better than a full length film which necessarily needs more detail. The more detail, the less likely all of that detail will advance the theme.

The *Twilight Zone* episode that won an Academy Award in the short film category was *An Occurrence at Owl Creek Bridge*, which depicts the execution by hanging of a Civil War soldier and the extreme fantasies that flash in his mind as he awaits execution. The theme is simply how we face death, or rather, are unable to face it. There isn't much talking in this episode—it is a visual experience.

One of the most overtly political *Twilight Zo*ne episode was *Shadow Play* starring Dennis Weaver. It depicts a man having a recurring, dream about being tried for a capital crime. It actually depicts an execution in the electric chair, followed by a restart of the dream. The point (or theme) being, that when you kill someone, you kill the world (or yourself).

The most famous of all the original series *Star Trek* episodes is *The City on the Edge of Forever*, guest starring Joan Collins. This episode uses time travel into the past to make the point that sometimes bad things happen in history to individuals that can have good consequences for humanity at large. It also raises the question of what happens when a soldier like Captain Kirk is faced with a choice between love and duty. It is the only episode in which Kirk falls in love, as opposed to merely jumping in bed, and the results are tragic. (Note that the episode *Elaan of Troyus*is distinguishable because the love is more on the woman's end). Strangely similar to the James Bond film *On Her Majesty's Secret Service* (from Ian Fleming's novel) that came a few years later in which James Bond falls in love and gets married, only to have his wife murdered on their wedding day. To be fair, note that the idea that going back in time to change the past can cause problems was done before Trek in the Twilight Zone series.

A movie with an obvious theme was the Charlie Sheen film directed by David Towhy called *The Arrival* (not to be confused with the later film called *Arrival*). This was a film about an invasion by aliens who wanted to terraform Planet Earth. The aliens say that they are merely accelerating a process of global warming already begun by humans. Talk about lifting a hot political topic from the headlines and dropping it into a film!

Now, someone like me who likes abstract concepts and philosophical ideas has a tendency to enjoy this kind of screenplay. For me, it creates additional layers of organization or meaning. However, the danger is that these themes can overpower the detail of the human interactions and plot in a way that makes the story seem inauthentic. So given a choice between advancing the theme or themes and have nonconforming detail in the story, my advice is not to worry about the nonconforming material. The reason is that a theme may create coherency, but it doesn't mean that your story is going to be convincing and emotionally compelling. It may or may not be. And, as I have conceded, themes matter more to some members of the audience than others. My own limited experience with fiction writing tells me that if I don't have some kind of theme or purpose that I'm trying to communicate, I won't have an organizing principle to help me make decisions about what goes in and what is taken out. But at the same time, I

would not like a theme to ruin emotional drama and audience engagement. I think this happened with Terence Malick's *The Thin Red Line* (as one example). On the other hand, I think *Medicine Man* worked as environmentalist advocacy. So perhaps we can just leave this as an open issue for the writers to resolve. But let us at a minimum treat with great respect the view of David Mamet that it is not the job of the writer to teach or communicate values, but simply to entertain. See David Mamet, *Dramatic Writing*, masterclass.com. Let us make that the presumption, a rebuttable presumption.

And while I'm at it, let me just say that among the sometimes uneven teleplays in *The Twilight Zone* there are real gems. Some of my favorite episodes (in addition to those discussed earlier) are *Walking Distance* (with Gig Young), *Back There* (with Russell Johnson), *The Obsolete Man* (with Burgess Meredith and Fritz Weaver), *He's Alive* (with Dennis Hopper), *Nightmare at 20,000 feet* (with William Shatner*), The Parallel* (with Steve Forrest), *Queen of the Nile* (with Ann Blyth) and *The Masks* (with Robert Keith).

Further, while there are many fun episodes of the original *Star Trek*, some of the episodes that raise some of the more interesting philosophical issues are: *Where No Man Has Gone Before, Shore Leave, Amok Time, Mirror Mirror, Assignment: Earth The Cloud Minders,* and *The Enterprise Incident.* In addition, there were a number of episodes, some of which were silly, which dealt with the dangers of artificial intelligence, including *The Ultimate Computer, What are Little Girls Made of, Spock's Brain, The Changeling* and *The Apple.* Taken together with the films *2001: A Space Odyssey, The Terminator and Terminator 2, A.I. and I, Robot,* it is not as if we have not had fair warning about the issue.

Finally, I'm tired of people making light of the fact that I like *Gilligan's Island*. Check out episode 27 *It's a Bird, It's a Plane* in which the castaways discover a jet pack and develop a plan to pick someone to fly it back to Hawaii. If you don't laugh at this episode, you probably wouldn't laugh at Rodney Dangerfield, Rowan Atkinson or Steve Martin either. (And that's not meant as a compliment, you understand).

Focus Question: Should A Writer Think About Production Costs?

In an ideal world, a writer wouldn't think in terms of cost. But given the high production costs faced by movie studios today, it is hard not to. I think of it as a cost-benefit analysis. If I have a great screenplay, then it would be a shame to worry about cost. But if I have a mediocre screenplay, it would be a big risk to spend too much money on it. To put things in perspective, the 1988 film by Peter Yates called *The House on Carroll Street* was shot entirely on location in New York City and cost $4 million and made $7 million. An even better example of cost efficiency back in the day was 1979's bicycling film *Breaking Away* with Dennis Christopher and Dennis Quaid. It cost just $2.3 million to make and made around $20 million. Today, I wonder whether you can do even just the catering and the trailers for $2.3 million.

On the other hand, the low-budget production of the 1951 *Detective Story* is tragic because two deeply emotional performances by Kirk Douglas and Eleanor Parker were wasted, at least partially. *The Maltese Falcon* is a good example of a novel (by Dashiell Hammett) that lent itself to a fairly low budget production. I'm not sure a modern audience would put up with a film that "talkie" today. The acting by Bogart was strong enough to make it fly back in the day, but how many of today's actors can replace Bogart?

Writers should beware that directors who are control freaks, OCD detail people and directors who don't really like to make decisions during the shoot and who like to clean things up in the editing room can both really run up the cost. That's why it may be prudent to be a bit conservative as a writer. I say "may" because obviously not all commercial hits are low budget. But consider one of the "home runs," the 2004 film *Sideways* with Paul Giamatti and Thomas Hayden Church. It cost $16 million to make and made over $109 million at the box office (in addition to being nominated for the 2004 Best Picture academy award). I watched the film at the theater because my eldest sister had recommended it and I found it interesting and fun, albeit in a quirky sort of way.

PART TWO

TAXONOMY

Restatement of Objective

To avoid losing focus, we restate our objective in analyzing films. We want to find out what elements make a screenplay compelling for the audience in the hope that it provides guidance for future writers seeking to fill the modern media's voracious demand for content. And if we are lucky, we may thereby find out something about what is in the American grain. That said, while I may comment on various aspects of the films here and there, this is not primarily a book about film technique, acting or production. Will there be subjectivity in the analysis? Of course, no way around that, but that's what will make it interesting.

Taxonomy/Grouping of Film Story Types

We are not going to break down movies into the typical genres such as Western, Gangster or Science Fiction because they are at too high a level of generality to be useful to the screenwriter--other than perhaps the basic distinction between a drama and an adventure. Our categories will go more to the substance of what drives the emotions underlying the human interactions in the story. Now there are at least two near universal principles for an industry backed film: (a) good struggles with evil and good wins out in the end; and (b) buddy films where people work together to fight evil can provide many dramatic opportunities.

Friend Films. The idea of a buddy film was noted above, but some films do an interesting twist by recognizing that friends can also be rivals and sometimes even "frenemies." Buddy films

include the *Star Wars, Star Trek and Lethal Weapon series, 48 Hours, Beverly Hills Cop, The Sting, Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid, The Fifth Element and Valerian and the City of a Thousand Plane*ts. Examples of rivalries include the *Star Trek reboot* by J.J. Abrams, *Tequilla Sunrise, Crimson Tide, L.A. Confidential, Chariots of Fire and Red Sun*. Films that go into the deeper aspects of friendship include *Julia*, *The Turning Point*, *The Deer Hunter* and *The Big Chill*.

Romance Films. The films about romance or love comes in a variety of forms. As Shakespeare put it "the course of true love never did run smooth," and this idea is the source of most of the dramatic opportunities in a romance film. As Mr. Spock says in the famous Star Trek episode *Amok Time*, "After a time, you will find that wanting is sometimes not so pleasing a thing as having." A certain amount of unrequited love makes the whole thing more interesting. Very few films have no love story in them, but predominantly romance films include *Casablanca, Unforgiven, From Here to Eternity, Remains of the Day, Cleopatra, Splendor in the Grass, The Sound of Music, My Fair Lady, The Shootist, The Eye of the Needle, Robin & Marian, Superman, Tootsie, The Graduate, An Officer and a Gentleman, The Electric Horseman, The Competition, Rebel Without a Cause, Starman, The Dead Zone, Ghost, Days of Heaven, Roman Holiday, Sabrina, Breakfast at Tiffany's, Two for the Road* and *Kiss of the Spider Woman*. The Europeans have given us a few films that tell us that men and women sometimes have not much in common, including *Belle du Jour, La Dolce Vita*, and *8 and ½.* Romance sometimes involves self-sacrifice and self-denial or suppression of one's own needs in order to help the object of one's affection, as shown in *Casablanca, Roman Holiday, Tequilla Sunrise, Gorky Park, and Dirty Pretty Things*.

Husband and Wife Films. A special type of romance film is a Husband and Wife Film. Stanley Donen's film *Two for the Road* is an example of why we don't see a lot of these kinds of films. Depicting a lifetime in film is difficult and somewhat boring. But if a writer can come up with the right story, there can be a bond and a level of emotional conflict between a husband of wife that presents a special dramatic opportunity. Films with a special husband and wife relationship include *Two for the Road, Excalibur, The Omen, The Great Santini, Dead Calm, Good Fellas, Casino, Mr. Mom, Fun With Dick and Jane* and *Where the Heart Is (1990). The Omen* is built entirely around the idea of a man whose love for his wife is so strong that it destroys him (or is used by Satan for that purpose). *Dead Calm* would be a B suspense film, except for the fact that the dedication showed by the husband and wife for each other makes it into something a bit more than that. Fine acting by Sam Neil helped sell that idea. Films that take a look at flawed marriages include *Detective Story, The Chase, Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf, The Lion in Winter, Come Back Little Sheba, The Arrangement, Ordinary People, Days of Heaven (*and to a lesser extent in *Earthquake* and *Excalibur).*

Parent/Child Films. The relationship between parents and children can be interesting, particularly when a parent is trying to "save" or "help" a child or when a child is rebelling against a parent. Dysfunctional families in particular are a good source of dramatic material. Parent/Child films include *Hud, Rebel Without a Cause, The Lion in Winter, Rage, Hardcore,*

Where the Heart Is, Back to the Future, The Grifters, The Godfather series, The Great Santini, Ordinary People, *Carrie, The Fury*, *A Christmas Story, Class, Back to School, Uncle Buck, Carrie* and the first *Star Wars* trilogy (episodes 4-6), *Smilla's Sense of Snow* (spiritual parenthood rather than biological), and *The Searchers* (uncle searching for hostage niece).

Disaster Films. There are many disaster films such *as The Posideon Adventure, Earthquake, The Towering Inferno, the Airport films, The China Syndrome, Grey Lady Down, Titanic* and, in a special way, *Jaw*s. All of these films are about people facing an impossible situation where the world around them is collapsing. We all feel that way from time to time and so we can relate to it. Some of these films arose during a period of economic hardship in the United States and that might account for their appeal. The drama is in seeing at least some people overcome the situation and survive, in watching people helping people survive, and yes in watching some people die. It puts things in perspective. Just as NASCAR wouldn't be as exciting if we didn't know in the back of our minds that a crash could occur at any time, the occasional death in a disaster film keeps the tension alive.

War Films: A war film is another kind of disaster film, but where the conflict results partly intended consequences and partly in unintended consequences due to the inherently chaotic nature of war. A war movie can be an occasion to celebrate the heroism of soldiers, such as *The Alamo, The Battle of Britain* and *Saving Private Ryan*, or it can be an occasion to lament the foolishness of war, such as *Play Dirty*, *A Bridge Too Far* and *The Thin Red Lin*e. Or it can be an occasion for both, such as *Das Boot, Full Metal Jacket, The Enemy Below* and *The Deer Hunter*. *Munich* may not seem like a war film, but it is fundamentally a story of a soldier's experience in war and its psychological aftermath. Some war films are really just adventure films in a war setting, such as *Force 10 From Navarone* and *The Dirty Dozen.* What is *Star Wars* or *The Last Starfighter*, but a war movie set in space? As ugly as war is, it is kinetic, it is exciting, it creates tension, it can trigger strong emotions. In other words, war was made for the movies. And as our further analysis will show, many of the war films that we have listed here also can be classified as other types of films, like "buddy" films. Indeed, *Kelly's Heroes* is a heist movie disguised as a war movie.

Nuclear BOP Films: A specialized type of war film is the nuclear balance of power (BOP) film, which involves the threat of the end of the world by nuclear war and the tense, cold war type, activity that helps to maintain the BOP while averting a nuclear exchange. Examples of these films are *Crimson Tide, The Hunt for Red October, Twilight's Last Gleaming, The Bedford Incident, Fail Saf*e and many of the original James Bond films where the evil organization SPECTRE stood in for the Soviet Union. Observe also that *Ghostbusters and Spies Like Us* are parables about the possible end of the world that arise out of the nuclear BOP. *Spies Like Us* is more explicit and perhaps for that reason, less successful, than *Ghostbusters.* What do nukes have to do with ghosts? Remember what happens when William Atherton as the EPA agent orders the shutdown of the trap for the ghostly spirits at the Ghostbuster's HQ (a former fire station)? There is a "fireworks-like" explosion vertically out of the roof of the building that

turns into what look like brightly colored missile trails flying over Manhattan. That is a proxy for launching nuclear weapons*. Ghostbusters* was therapy for our cold war tensions.

Hostage Films. There are a few hostage films such *as Dog Day Afternoon, The Taking of Pelham One, Two and Three, The Final Option, and Die Hard*. Being a hostage in a way is worse than being in a natural disaster because the harm is being intentionally inflicted upon you by other people who seem to be enjoying the power they wield over you. Now, it wouldn't be fun to have a hostage film end in all hostages dying and the kidnappers escaping to a neutral country with no extradition treaty. So even before the film begins the audience unconsciously knows that the kidnappers are going to fail in the end at least some of the hostages are going to survive and be returned to freedom. The fun part of hostage film, then, is in watching things go wrong for the kidnappers. This might be the result of their own incompetence or the result of the work of police or military countermeasures or both. Either way, it is fun to watch as the kidnappers get what they deserve. It is a bit of the old *Schaudenfreude.* A hostage film also provides an opportunity for a heroic, action-packed, rescue, such as in *The Final Optio*n (which is a film that is more sexist than some might approve of).

Serial Killer Films: If the violent interests of the public weren't already obvious from war movies, it should be clarified beyond dispute by their interest in films about serial killers. Think of *The Night of the Hunter, Cape Fear (1 and 2), Psycho, Frenzy, Manhunter, The Silence of the Lambs (and its sequels), Cop, Blood Simple, Blue Velvet, Basic Instinct, No Way to Treat a Lad*y and *A Clockwork Orange*. A serial killer film can be fun because it sets up a *mano a mano* conflict between the serial killer and the law enforcement officer who is trying to capture him (or her). It is also an opportunity for a little realistic horror. If you're not persuaded by the more fanciful serial killers like Count Dracula or a werewolf, you can't deny the horror of a human acting not only with intentionality, but with great pleasure. It is a bit like rubbernecking when driving by an auto accident. We can't help but be fascinated by gore. It might not say much for us, but it is obviously part of who we are. In the end, serial killer films are just cops and robbers kicked up a notch. Having a law enforcement type stop a super evil person heightens the intensity of our experience. Why make a film about a cop busting a robber, when you can make a film about a cop busting a serial killer that "does things to the bodies"? It's more compelling. Here's a tip: the most hauntingly beautiful, and yet terrifying image of death in a movie that I have ever seen is in *The Night of the Hunter*, which was Charles Laughton's only outing as a director. I was well into middle age when I saw the film for the first time and that image scared me, even as it drew me in like a magnet.

Spy Films: Some spy films are merely cops and robbers films in a spy setting where a law enforcement officer is seeking to stop the spy, such as *The Fourth Protocol, Scorpio, The Day of the Jackal, The Eye of the Needl*e and *The Survivor* are examples.   Some spy films are done from the perspective of the protagonist as the spy, which is cops and robbers in reverse, or a species of the conspiracy film which will be addressed later. Examples of this latter type *are No Way Out, Enigma, The Spy Who Came in From the Cold and Tinker, Tailor, Soldier,* Spy and the Jack

Ryan and Jason Bourne films. Spy films automatically create tension because the spy is usually trying to evade discover and capture. A *James Bond* film is a special case because it is at bottom a cops and robbers films where James Bond is a cop and the bad guy is just an unusually ambitious and sophisticated criminal who threatens something big like a nuclear exchange. A specialized type of spy film ends in an attempt at an assassination, such as *The Manchurian Candidate, Black Sunday, The Day of the Jackal* and *Survivor*. Assassinations and the attempt to prevent them or execute them create tension. Note that even *Star Trek: The Undiscovered Country* is partly just an assassination film set in space.

Underdog Films: Americans love an underdog, probably because our country was founded by underdogs against Great Britain, but also because our Judeo-Christian tradition teaches us about the Jews who started as underdogs and which teaches that the last shall be first. There is something compelling about any humans fighting an establishment with greater power. These films include *Star Wars, The Graduate, Cool Hand Luke, The Grapes of Wrath, Norma Rae, The Verdict, A Few Good Men, Rocky, Hard Times, Breaking Away, The Black Stallio*n, *Seabiscuit* and *Dirty Pretty Things*. A specialized version of the underdog film is the Holocaust film, such as *Julia, Sophie's Choice* and *Schindler's List*. To put it in more formal terms, a film about an underdog is usually about someone overcoming oppression. To refine that further, a specific type of oppression film is the prison escape movie, including *The Great Escape, Papillon, Escape from New York, Escape from L.A.* and *Escape from Alcatraz.* Escape from a cage is an inherently compelling human interest situation and most people know that sometimes even good people get thrown into prison. There are comedy versions of the underdog story, including *Animal House, The Blues Brothers, Caddyshack, Trading Places, Revenge of the Nerds, Real Genius* and *Back to School*. Comedy lends itself to a subversive plot, obviously.

Rebel Films: Similar to an underdog, but usually a bad guy/gal who comes ultimately to a bad end, Americans sometimes love a little counterculture. These films include *Rebel without a Cause, Badlands, Bonnie and Clyde, The Sugarland Express, Frances, Thelma and Louise, Falling Dow*n and *Cool Hand Luke.* We might also call these "Outlaw Films."

Integrity Films: Integrity films are usually structured as one good person standing against the system. These include *Mr. Smith Goes to Washington, High Noon, A Man for All Seasons, Three Days of the Condor, Chariots of Fire, Norma Rae, The Electric Horseman* and *Iron man*. We like integrity films because at least some of us want to think well of ourselves and think that we are good people who might have the courage to stand up for good things, even if that doesn't happen that much in the real world. These are compelling because they help us fantasize about being heroes, but heroes of the mind more than heroes of the body like soldiers in a war. Of course the flip side of these films is that society doesn't like antisocial people who refuse to be part of the team. *Cool Hand Luke* is significant because of its ambiguities on this point.

Alien and Monster Films: Films about aliens from outer space break down into those about friendly aliens and those about hostile. aliens It makes sense that we humans would be interested in this kind of story becaus*e* throughout our history we have expanded beyond our

families and tribes and countries to interact with people we find "other" or "alien" and the first thing we want to find out is whether they are friend or foe. Examples of friendly alien films *are The Day the Earth Stood Still, Close Encounters of the Third Kind, ET: the extraterrestrial, Starman, The Abyss, Contact, Interstellar, Arrival*. Examples of hostile alien films are most of the films from the mid-20th century like *The Thing, The Blob, IT: The Creature from Outer Space, Earth vs. the Flying Saucers, 20,000 Miles to Eart*h, etc., etc., and more recent films like *The Andromeda Strain, Alien, John Carpenter's The Thing,* Philip Kaufman's *Invasion of the Body Snatchers, Predator, Independence Day, Arriva*l (Charlie sheen). There isn't much difference between an alien film and a monster film other than the type of monster and the rarity of any of them being friendly. Typically, the monster is either created by a scientist or helped by a scientist who thinks it is an important species. There are myriad films of this type, from the old *Frankenstein, Dracula, Wolfman, Mummy, Creature from the Black Lagoon, Godzilla* and the many similar Japanese monsters in rubber suits, *The Hunger, Wolfen, The Howling, An American Werewolf in London, The Fly, Alien, Aliens, Predator, Jurassic Park, Lifeforce, Bram Stoker's Dracula, The Relic*, and germ films like *The Andromeda Strain, Outbreak*.   It may seem strange to some that science fiction movies often are anti-science, but futurists have often worried about the negative consequences of technology, particularly after the invention of the atomic bomb and Robert Oppenheimer's famous statement "Now I am become Death, the destroyer of worlds." But in truth these concerns go back much farther to the James Whale's *Frankenstei*n and Howard Hawks' *The Thing*.

Revenge Films: Revenge stories go back a long way in history, but the most famous is "Hamlet, Prince of Denmark," which is a play about the rightful future king of Denmark whose destiny is thwarted by his evil Uncle and his entire life purpose becomes revenge. The good thing about revenge as a movie theme is that it is easy to understand and is emotionally charged. Examples of revenge films include *Robocop, Dirty Harry, Hang 'Em High, The Outlaw Josey Wales, Marathon Man a*nd *Star Trek: The Wrath of Khan*. They also include most *James Bond* films because these almost always have a minor associate on the side of 007 get killed by the bad guy and this helps to fuel Bond's motivation. Revenge films are often grounded in some kind of betrayal which people can relate to in their lives, but more importantly, because betrayal is part of the Judeo-Christian tradition. Consider the story of Joseph, Moses and Jesus Christ himself— all victims of betrayal at one time or another. Observe also that one of the finest Westerns and revenge films*, The Outlaw Josey Wales*, is also partly a buddy film because Josey Wales hooks up with some other like-minded folks who are fugitives and being hunted. That is to say that *The Outlaw Josey Wales* is only partly a revenge film.

Conspiracy Films: Conspiracy films sometimes are also spy films, but not always because the victims of conspiracies can be ordinary people and the bad guys can be agents of big business as often as they are agents of government. People like conspiracy theories because it makes them feel important as the focus of a conspiracy and because it implies that someone is in control and is fairly smart, which in a strange way can be comforting to some. Conspiracy films often contain a betrayal of some sort and some revenge.   Conspiracy films include *The Blue*

Max, The Conversation, The Friends of Eddie Coyle, Network, Scorpio, Three Days of the Condor, Marathon Man, Capricorn One, The Formula, Wall Street, Gorky Park, The Eye of the Needle, Total Recall, Eastern Promises, The Departed and *Dirty Pretty Things.*

Film Noir: In the 1940's and early 1950's there were a special type of black and white film that focused on the seamier side of city life, telling the story of how bad things happen to bad people. Even though these characters are far from paragons of virtue, the audience can empathize with them because they are ordinary, have human weaknesses, and are often struggling in difficult circumstances. These films include *Night and the City, Where the Sidewalk Ends, Touch of Evil, Double Indemnity, The Asphalt Jungle, Postman Always Rings Twice, The Lady From Shanghai and The Maltese Falcon.*

City Films: There are some films set in New York or Los Angeles for which the story cannot be separated from their location. There is a sense of place that is a character in and of itself. For New York, *The Godfather, Goodfellas, The French Connection, Breakfast at Tiffany's, State of Grace, Wall Street* and *Quiz Show*. For Los Angeles, *Sunset Boulevard, Chinatown, The Day of the Locust, Tequilla Sunrise, Frances, Colors, To Live and Die in L.A., Falling Down* and *L.A. Confidential.*

Historical Films (Docudramas and Biopics): (A) *The Alamo, The Battle of Britain, All the President's Men, Chariots of Fire, The Right Stuff, Apollo 13, Reversal of Fortune, Goodfellas, Schindler's List, Quiz Show, American Hustle, The Big Short* and *The Post.* (B) *Joan of Arc, Lawrence of Arabia, A Man for All Seasons, Anne of a Thousand Days, Mary Queen of Scots, The Desert Fox, Patton, MacArthur, Tucker, Amadeus, Reds, The Elephant Man, Goodfellas, Casino, The Informant, The Aviator, The Wolf of Wall Street, Lincoln, Black Mass* and *Trumbo.* These films are tough to do because life isn't always a movie, duh.

Miscellaneous Themes: There are a variety of loose end categories that should be identified. Lawyer films, including *12 Angry Men, Inherit the Wind, To Kill A Mockingbird, And Justice for All, Legal Eagles, The Verdict, A Few Good Men, Reversal of Fortune, Amistad, The Rainmaker, The Firm, A Time to Kill.* Quest films, including *The Searchers, Willow,* and to a limited extent *Excalibu*r and the *Indiana Jones* films. Heist films *including The Asphalt Jungle, The Killing, The Thomas Crown Affair (old and new), The Anderson Tapes, Kelly's Heroes, The Taking of Pelham 1-2-3, Dog Day Afternoon, Thief, Heist, Heat, Reservoir Dogs, The Inside Job, Ocean's Eleven, The Italian Job, Inception, Hell or High Water*. Elderly last hurrah films, including *Robin & Marian, The Shootist, The Sunshine Boys, Cocoon, Going in Style*.   Time travel films, including *It's A Wonderful Life, Scrooge, Back to the Future, Time After Time, Star Trek: First Contact, Arrival*. Pursuit (by others) films, including *The Invasion of the Body Snatchers* (both versions), *The Stalking Moon, The Outlaw Josey Wales, No Way Out*. Obsolescence films, including *The Grapes of Wrath, Sunset Boulevard, Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid, The Conversation, The Hunger, Blade Runner, Glengarry Glen Ross.* Musical films, including *Show Boat (1951), The Sound of Music, Mary Poppins, Hair, LA LA Land, All That Jazz, Singing in the Rain, West Side Story, Gigi, Show Boat, Grease and Sargent Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band*. Cartoon films,

including *Sleeping Beauty, Peter Pan, The Little Mermaid, Aladdin, Frozen* and *Coco.* <u>Silly heroic nonsense films</u>, including *Robin and Marian, Swashbuckler, Superman, The Princess Bride, Big Trouble in Little China, Star Wars,* the Indiana Jones films*, High Road to China, Quigley Down Under, The Road Warrior, Aliens, The Rocketeer, Sky Captain and the World of Tomorrow,* the Jack Ryan films, the Jason Bourne films*, Iron Man*, *Star Trek (2009)* and *Survivor (2015).*

<u>PART THREE</u>

ANALYSIS OF SELECTED FILMS

I'm going to analyze a few selected films that I think were based on superior stories from a cinematic standpoint. What does that mean? It means that some stories make for good films while others make for mediocre films. The selection here doesn't mean that I consider these the best movies of all time, but it does mean that I think these stories have something important to say about what drives a good film from the perspective of human psychology and emotions. So here goes…

Showboat (1951) is my idea of everything that a movie should be. It is beautiful to look at and listen to and fun while at the same time never losing sight of the dark, tragic reality that life can be underneath our attempts to entertain ourselves with shows. Richard Rodger's score is one of his best because it is the closest of all his musicals to true opera. It is Ava Gardner's movie, because no one can bring the idea of "the curse of beauty" to a boil the way she does. In the end, she doesn't share in the happy ending, which is similar to what happens to the character Jacques in Shakespeare's comedy play "As You Like It." There must be a contrast in art as in life and a good writer knows that. It may be sad to say, but your joy exists partly in reference to the relative suffering of others. Remember the scene in *The Elephant Man* were Anne Bancroft takes John Merrick (played by John Hurt) to the theater, but afterward, Merrick's thoughts are with the troll trapped in the dungeon. This notion also runs underneath *Showboat.* Does *Showboat* depict an America that never really existed? Yes, but at the same time, this piece of art could not have been produced in any other country. Nobody has the kind of robust idealism that Americans have, or at least, once had.

The Unforgiven is a western with Burt Lancaster and Audrey Hepburn is not to be confused with Clint Eastwood's *Unforgiven*. Audrey Hepburn plays the child of an interracial coupling (White-Native American), a truly forbidden coupling in the days of the old West. Being adopted, she doesn't even know that she is of mixed heritage. Burt Lancaster is her brother and both of them are unaware that they are not related by blood, which adds some interesting elements to the fact that the "sister' and "brother" are secretly in love with each other, despite Hepburn being wooed by another man. This situation sets up some good melodrama around the "overprotectiveness" shown by Lancaster for Hepburn and for the later discovery of Hepburn's true identity. These themes are fairly raw, perhaps even more so than the story of the young girl abducted by an Indian tribe in *The Searchers*.

Rebel Without a Cause is a typically over-emotional Elia Kazan film, but notable for presenting an indecisive and weak father (Jim Backus) who has been turned into a wife by his own domineering wife and the ripple effects on a teenage son (James Dean) who is trying to define what it is to be a man. A secondary plot concerns the slightly abusive father of Natalie Wood, who seems to have some unconscious amorous feelings for his daughter, who he calls "glamour-puss." And Sal Mineo as a young boy who worships James Dean and becomes the third wheel when Dean and Wood become boyfriend and girlfriend, and one senses that Mineo's affection for Dean is more than Platonic. A situation ripe for emotional perturbations, interpersonal conflict, and general human dysfunction. A bit more interesting than some oversized CGI transformers banging around, wouldn't you say?

The Thomas Crown Affair is a heist film plus a romance. It is about a rich, sophisticated thief played by Steve McQueen and the investigator hired by an insurance company to catch him played by Faye Dunaway. The film is like Shakespeare's play "Romeo and Juliet" in swinging back and forth between comedy and tragedy as we try to determine how these two can fall in love at the same time that one is trying to destroy the other. This alternation creates enough dramatic tension to hold the film together, when added to the obvious personal chemistry and friendship between the two main actors. We wonder—can Faye Dunaway really be so ruthless and mercenary to be willing to destroy the man she loves and break her own heart? With an actress the caliber of Faye Dunaway, we really don't know the outcome until the end of the film.

Jaws is a classic film that reminds of our primal fear of death by being eaten by an animal, compounded with our fear of the ocean and the depths that we cannot see into while we are swimming, vulnerable as babies on the surface of the water. The film starts fast with a shocking scene of violent death by shark attack at night, a scene that director Stephen Spielberg said that once he "had them" at the beginning with that shocker, he would have them for the rest of the film. The reason is that after that initial scare, the audience is always on edge waiting for the next shoe to drop. In the language of the high school English teachers of my youth, this is a film about man versus nature, but it is also a film about man versus man because there is a conflict between Chief Brody (Roy Scheider) who is trying to close the beaches and The Mayor (Murray Hamilton) who wants to keep them open for the July 4th holiday. There is a further conflict between Captain Quint (Robert Shaw) and oceanographer Matt Hooper (Richard Dreyfuss) who come from very different backgrounds and have different ideas about how to handle the shark. There is a further conflict between Chief Brody, who wants to put back into port and get a bigger boat, and Captain Quint who wants to remain at sea to catch the shark. Now, while conflict is important, the conflict present in the original novel by Peter Benchley was toned down for the film. In the original, Matt Hooper is a good-looking Ivy League rich guy who sleeps with Chief Brody's wife. They wisely did away with that because it hurts the camaraderie/ "buddy film" aspect of the three men (Brody, Hooper and Quint) working together to kill the shark. There is such a thing as too much conflict, and that kind of love melodrama would have been distracting from the simple-minded directness of the film. It would have also interfered

with the easy to relate to emotions of Chief Brody's wife as he goes out to sea to face danger and his own fear of drowning. In the end, good guys kill bad shark and survive, albeit with some casualties along the way. Happy Hollywood ending, more or less, and the release of the intense tension created by the fear of death by shark was palpable. Note the end credits with the long shot of the beach and ocean and the serene, church bell-like music that John Williams applies almost as a salve.

The Omen is a conventional horror film with the usual scare tactics on one level, but on a deeper level it is a film about the destruction of the family by Satan. What makes the film interesting is that lever used by Satan against Ambassador Robert Thorn (Gregory Peck) is his overriding love for his wife (Lee Remick). He is always trying to protect her from being hurt and it gets him into a lie about their child that ends up destroying them both. The other thing that is interesting about the film is that it shows the transformation of Robert Thorn from an important public figure and good family man in total control of the situation to a desperate, frayed man trying to put a knife into his own son. A very juicy part for any actor to nosh on! The film is also partly a quest/search film, but adds the element of unavoidable prophecy about death. In some ways, this film is a bit silly, but what makes it compelling is the tragic love story that runs underneath the horror plot. Warning: the reason Dick Van Dyke turned down the part of Ambassador Thorn is because he thought the screenplay was too gory. He was right about that.

Carrie was Stephen King's first novel and the language is relatively clumsy as compared to his more mature works, but it remains one of his strongest plots because, like *Jaws*, it is primal. The story concerns a teenage girl played by Sissy Spacek whose puberty also produces a telekinetic ability. She is already a social outcast and this makes it worse. Everyone, even the "beautiful people" can related to feeling like an outside in high school and when one is bullied or teased enough, there is sometime a reaction. Elementally, Carrie is a revenge film, but it is also about the self-destructive nature of power, particularly when that power is out of control. The other very realistic aspect of the film is the dysfunctional relationship between Carrie and her mother, played by Piper Laurie, who has gone off the Christian deep end. Everyone knows at least one person, often a woman, who is single and aging and who becomes a "Holy Roller." So while the trappings of the film are the typical horror scare tactics, there is a familiar human tale being told underneath the special effects. One of the best aspects of the film is Pino Donaggio's music score which alternates between terror and a saccharine sweet love theme. The score has a great segment when Carrie cuts loose with her powers in the school gym. All we hear is a few odd sounds like electricity which is the composer's depiction of her force field.

The Great Santini was based on a novel about the dynamics of a military family.   What happens to the wife and children when you have a very macho husband/father and who have to move from military base to military base? The kids have a little bit of a tough time, but some of the discipline is good for them. But when your father is a fighter pilot squadron leader, he might be a bit more aggressive than even the standard grade macho man. The wife, who is left

abandoned a lot of the time because her husband is away, ends up directing a good part her love to her first born son, which turns him into a mama's boy, which in turn fosters conflict between the son and the macho father. The father tries to toughen up the son, which creates further conflict between the father and his wife. This is emotional stuff! The other thing about this dynamic is that it is not uncommon and therefore can be easily related to by the audience. In addition, because the film is about an aviator, there is an opportunity for scenes of airplanes flying in the sky and deeds of daring do. Now, that alone might not seem like quite enough for a film or novel, and in fact there is a subplot around racial conflict in the South. The subplot, when added to the main plot, makes for a fairly satisfying drama.

Class is part comedy and part drama. This film is about a middle class teenage (Andrew McCarthy) who goes to an elite prep school and befriends an aristocratic student (Rob Lowe) who seems to have it all—good looks, intelligence, charm, wit and money. But upon closer inspection we find out that all is not roses in the land of the aristocracy and that Rob Lowe's parents, played by Jacqueline Bisset and Cliff Robertson, have real problems with each other. In fact, the mother is so dysfunctional that she has a fling with Andrew McCarthy in an elevator. Now, some would say this was an immoral tale, but it rings true that sometimes some parts of an aristocracy can be decadent. But that's not really the point of the film. The question of "class" really boils down to the question of whether Rob Lowe has enough noblesse oblige to forgive his friend Andrew McCarthy from having sex with his mother? Very tough issue to overcome. But if it is possible to overcome, is that the true measure of friendship, forgiveness and noblesse oblige? This is a film which is styled as a comedy but which has much deeper elements in melodrama and morality. And that's probably why actors of the stature of Bisset and Robertson even agreed to be in it.

Back to the Future is a brilliant comedy driven by the most perfect plot premise in any comedy I have seen. The hero, played by Michael J. Fox, goes back in time, meets his parents in such a way as to eliminate his own future, must set things right and return to the future at the exact moment lighting strikes a clock tower. Bob Zemeckis and Bob Gale get the award for the greatest brainstorm ever in coming up with this plot because it has great inherent dramatic tension. But what makes the film so funny is that the main problem that Michael J. Fox must solve is that when he goes back in time, his mother falls in love with him, instead of his father. Patching that up while Michael J. Fox and his professor friend played by Christopher Lloyd try to solve the technical problem of getting back to future, creates an opportunity for plenty of action and funny dialogue. But what the audience can most relate to in the film is that Michael J. Fox's parents are fairly dysfunctional people, even as they are a couple destined to be together. There is something very human about that idea and therefore the film is easy to relate to. *Back to the Future* is also an example of a film that reflected its times. Conservatism had been recently revived around the presidency of Ronald Reagan and taken together with the nostalgic feeling for the 50's started by *American Graffiti* and its television spin off *Happy Days*, there was a certain social reverberation about *Back to the Future*.

Uncle Buck is a fine John Hughes comedy about an uncle played by John Candy who is a borderline bum and incompetent, but who has a heart of gold. He is asked to emergency babysit his teenage niece and young nephew who hardly know him while their parents are away tending to the wife's father. The uncle tries to keep his wild teenage niece out of trouble with a boy who is a predator, while she tries to thwart him at every turn. It is a simple story about being an uncle who cares and about how someone you don't like at first can become someone you care about as you get to know them. And, like *Class*, it is also about how true friendship means being forgiving of things that most people would not forgive.

Mister Johnson is a film about colonialism and the unintended consequences of trying to "help" indigenous populations and impose Western values and goals on cultures that see the world differently. Pierce Brosnan is quite good in the film and not the least because the audience never really knows whether he is secretly enjoying the painful aspects of what he is doing. *A Passage to India* was also about colonialism, based on the novel by the British author E.M. Forster, but it involves forbidden love, while *Mister Johnson* doesn't even bother with such sentimental, romantic ideas. Both films have a sequence involving a trial and that is telling because British ideas about justice were one of the Empire's most significant exports historically, including influencing the nascent United States of America. Of course *Lawrence of Arabia* and *Ghandi* also address colonialism, but they are essentially histories and lack the thematic coherency of fiction. I suspect non-indigenous or non-local people may have difficulty understanding why it might have been very distressing to have people who were rejects from where they originally came from coming to another place and acting superior. Colonialism was mostly about power and exploitation for profit, but that's not the whole story. At the same time, there were benefits from religious missionaries who insisted on education. The fact is that anyone who is trying to help someone else is implying that that other person is in some way worse off than they are. This kind of emotional and ethical complexity can give rise to a good dramatic story.

Dirty Pretty Things is a conspiracy film plus a romance. It involves illegal immigrants who fall in love but cannot be lovers and who are victimized by the seamy underbelly of the grey market world because they have no legal status. The film depicts life as harsh and people as nasty and selfish and it presents a convincing impossible love story such as is depicted in *The Remains of the Day* and *The Wind and the Lion*. There is always something sweeter about an impossible romance because it retains its "purity" of not being about sex. It's not that I want to advocate Puritanical values, it's just that in real life most romantic feelings that one has cannot be acted upon.

Smilla's Sense of Snow is a revenge film plus a science fiction film plus a conspiracy thriller with a main character with some of the qualities of a female "James Bond." It owes this brilliant synthesis to the original novel's author Peter Hoeg. This is one film that heaps motivation upon motivation. Not only does the main character want to solve and revenge the killing of a child, she also is busy unravelling a big cover up of a dangerous scientific discovery, and is fighting

back against the system as a woman and a mixed race minority. This story setup puts you on her side quickly and unequivocally and once there the action carries you along with ease.

Inception is a science fiction film that I initially found pedantic and repetitive in its technical idea that someone could go into someone's dreams and manipulate what was going on. But it ultimately turned into something more meaningful in dealing with the issue of tragic error in a relationship between a husband and wife and the difficulty of moving beyond that kind of pain. It was like wrapping a superficial science fiction heist film around a shockingly real tale of human emotion.   Has anyone seen a marriage in which the partners lied to each other and lied to themselves just a tiny little bit? It can be hard not to. Human egos rarely hold up under the harsh light of absolute truth (or the idiotic notion of zero tolerance). Even if people don't engage in outright lies, there is a lot that they remain silent about. The question is: at what point do those lies mean that you don't really have a relationship and are just playing at one? (Okay, that exceeds the topic area, I admit that).

Arrival is a science fiction film directed by Denis Villenueva that plays with the idea that time is nonlinear in the context of the usual alien encounter story. It would have been a conventional film, except that it became a story about a husband, wife and child that emphasized the fleeting and precious aspect of the moments that we spend with those we care about. The fact that life is short can either render life meaningless or meaningful, depending on the perspective that one wishes to take.

Coco is a cartoon from Disney/Pixar with a story that is unusually strong, in addition to very good design, CGI, music and a sense of humor. It follows precisely the advice of Aaron Sorkin to create "intention and obstacle." Sorkin, Aaron, *Screenwriting,* masterclass.com. The protagonist is a young boy who wants to be a musician, but he is blocked by his family and must navigate a variety of obstacles to get where he wants to go. This was easy for me to understand because everyone has to find their own way and they do it partly by either following their parents or pushing away from them. The search for identity and meaning is a classic storyline, only to be beatable by the straight struggle for survival, which is even more primal. The film has important themes about family and memory and admits that life can be tragic and that people sometimes choose evil. Because the film was released just prior to the posting of this book, I don't want to disclose too many details and spoil the movie going experience. But I will say that *Coco* seemed to have prior models, including *Back to the Future, Beetlejuice, The Nightmare Before Christmas, Valerian and the City of a Thousand Planets*, and from a visual standpoint, the night cityscape from the skycar chase sequence in *Star Wars* episode 2 *Attack of the Clones*. That didn't bother me because the story was so well put together and kept moving forward at all times. Art is a collaborative effort, even if an artist is working alone, because every artist has prior exemplars to work from.

THE LONG FORM FILM

The Western *Lonesome Dove* directed by Simon Wincer and starring Robert Duvall was one of the first long form television mini-series that truly worked on a coherent emotional level throughout. It's a story about how life is hard (nasty, brutish and short), how love usually fails in one way or another, and how we lose the people we care about the most. In sum, it is a tale that says: "we're Americans, and we got grit." The beauty of the landscapes is what makes it all tolerable and even kind of enjoyable. You get the feeling that even as the characters experience suffering, in a strange way, they are enjoying it.   And you get a sense that whatever the fictional aspects of Larry McMurty's novel, it contains certain basic truths about life, love and death. By the way, I think Diane Lane's performance is the best of the lot because her Texas twang is the most understated. My favorite part of the film is when Robert Duvall explains to Diane Lane (who has a dream of going to San Francisco as if that's going to make all the difference) that to be happy in life you have to be happy with the little things that happen each day, like a soft bed and a sip of buttermilk. That's truthful and deep. Don't think of that as pedantry by the writer, think of it as adding value, adding richness, adding texture. In the end, *Lonesome Dove* is a "tough guy" movie of which there are many examples, but the most convincing of which include *The Outlaw Josey Wales, Hard Times* and *Breaker Morant.*

There were a number of long form miniseries on the old network television, but the only other one that I liked was *The Winds of War* starring Robert Mitchum and Victoria Tennant. It captures a romantic sense of the WW2 period by juxtaposing the grandiose and tragic epic of war with the problems of a few people that, as in *Casablanca*, don't amount to a hill of beans.

More modernly, there have been very successful new series on the new media delivery platforms like Netflix. The reason I'm not going to analyze them is that I don't really know how one writes a story that spans five television "seasons." I suspect that it is a bit like writing a soap opera, just slightly less open ended. But not knowing enough of that type of film, I'm just going to fall silent on the topic.

PART FOUR:

NICKEL AND DIMING FOR FUN

Let me do a little hit and run on a few odds and ends, please.

There are a few directors who add some special touches that are worth taking note of. In Stephen Spielberg's early films, including *Duel, The Sugarland Express* and *Jaws*, he will have actors who are outside the main part of the story carrying on conversations in the foreground or background that are completely independent of the main dialogue between the main actors that are happening at the same time. The effect is like an opera song with multiple singers

singing at the same time and the purpose is to create a sense of reality. In real life people are often talking at the same time, over each other, independently of each other. But few directors and writers have taken up Spielberg's technique, and indeed he himself more or less abandoned it as he grew older.

The use of period popular music in film to create a sense of time and place was critical in George Lucas' *American Graffiti* and Martin Scorcese's *GoodFellas*. Other examples are the use of the song "Mr. Sandman" in *Back to the Future* and "The Unchained Melody" in *Ghost*. A very specific use was in *Close Encounters of the Third Kind* during the alien abduction scene when Melinda Dillon is holding her son and slow turns around to Johnny Mathis singing 'Chances Are". I believe that idea came out of a collaboration between editor Michael Kahn and the director Stephen Spielberg. Classical music use in film can also be iconic such as the use of the opening of "Also Sprach Zarathustra" by Richard Strauss in *2001: A Space Odyssey* and the "Waltz no. 2" from the "Jazz Suite No. 2" by Dimitri Shostakovich in *Eyes Wide Shut*.

Here's a tough question: what can we learn from *Count Yorga*? Who the heck is Count Yorga, you ask? In the early seventies, there were two grade B vampire films starring Robert Quarry as a fairly convincing vampire named Count Yorga (at least he looked the part). The films are largely forgettable (although I was frightened by them as a young boy), but they teach us two things (I'll do A and B). (A) The first film, *Count Yorga, Vampire,* starred Judy Lang who was a serious beauty and a reasonable actress (as is her daughter), but who you wouldn't know. Hollywood can be cruel to people, even if they have talent. Consider also Sue Lyon, who did *Lolita a*nd *Night of the Iguana*. Take a look at her and ask yourself this: if Jane Fonda and Ann Margaret can be big stars, why not Sue Lyon? (B) The second film, *The Return of Count Yorga*, was substantially better than the first film mainly because the director of photography was Bill Butler, who was later tapped to photograph *Jaws*. A talented photographer can elevate the quality of a film far above its natural level. Butler does a shot of Yorga reflected in the dark night waters of a boat harbor and it is a masterstroke.

And not to push the vampire movie as exemplar too far, but Count Dracula presents a good case study for students of film because it has been done so many times, even after eliminating the legion of rip-off films with vampires of different names. Some of the best versions of Dracula are: (a) the BBC version with Louis Jordan from 1977 (*Count Dracula*); (b) the Dan Curtis version with Jack Palance from 1974 (*Bram Stoker's Dracula*); (c) the Hammer film with Christopher Lee and Peter Cushing from 1958 (*The Horror of Dracula*); (d) the Francis Ford Coppola version with Gary Oldman (*Bram Stoker's Dracula*); and (e) the John Badham version from 1979 derived from the Broadway play (*Dracula*). It is telling that the film never really works dramatically despite the talent that is thrown at it, including Richard Matheson as screenwriter in the Dan Curtis version (who smartly removed the Renfield subplot) and W.D. Richter as screenwriter in the John Badham version. There is something about the story that just doesn't work right and which has nothing to do with the production people or the actors.

For me, the best part of the Dracula schtick has always been the three lady vampires. There is something about pretty ladies with fangs that can't be beat and without which the films wouldn't even be worth watching. In the BBC television version with Louis Jordan as *Count Dracula*, there is a moment when one of the lady vampires puts her hand on the arm of another lady vampire and gives it a short, light hand stroke. That's all you need, folks, to tell the story. Of course the entire point of the original Bram Stoker novel from 1897 was to be an allegory for the awakening of female sexuality in the context of a world with Victorian morays (he was Irish, despite his unusual name). What sold books back then is what sold movie tickets more modernly. Consider *The Hunger*, the pop fashion vampire derivative by Tony Scott from 1983 with bloodsuckers played by Catherine Denueve, Susan Sarandon and David Bowie which has one of the first explicit lesbian love scene in a commercial film between Denueve and Sarandon. And further consider *Lifeforce*, the sci-fi/horror vampire derivative by Tobe Hooper from 1985, which features as the lead vampire a beautiful young lady named Mathilda May who does most of the first part of the film walking around completely naked. I wonder why they did that? And why cast Kate Beckinsale in the *Underworld* series which began in 2003? Again, I'm not endorsing a moral code. That's entertainment!

In addition, not to appear trivial, but a bad accent can remove "the willing suspension of disbelief." I find that British actors have sometimes had difficulty with fake German accents. Check out Lawrence Olivier in *Dracula*, Anthony Hopkins in *Bram Stoker's Dracula*, and John Gielgud in *The Formula*. Doing German isn't like doing an Irish or Scottish accent; one should be understated about it. But of course it is not only the British who muck up the German accent. Check out Robert Duvall in *The Eagle Has Landed*. To hear English with a real German accent in film, try Maximillian Schell or Hardy Kruger, or to hear a fake one that was done as if it was real, try Meryl Streep speaking in German to the concentration camp commandant in *Sophie's Choice*. Done right, German is a beautiful language. Done wrong, it sounds like a jackboot on someone's throat, or as the Kapellmeister says in *Amadeus*, "too brute a force." Of course, there are elements of the language that lend themselves to criticism. For example, one German word for "soft" is the word "zart." Not exactly a case of sound mirroring meaning.

I also want to give a nod to the comedies that showed something that I found just plain side-splitting: (a) In *Airplane*, when Robert Stack is walking through the airport beating up the various people like Hare Krishnas who come up to him offering peace and love; (b) Gene Hackman and Peter Boyle in *Young Frankenstein*, playing the scene with the monster and the blind man who takes him in; (c) the brief "fishy-fishy, find the fishy' scene from Monty Python's *The Meaning of Life*; (d) the scene in *Animal House* when John Vernon as Dean Wormer tells John Belushi that his grade point average is "zero-point-zero' and Belushi has a pair of pencils up his nose, eraser side up; (e) Peter Sellers in *The Pink Panther Strikes Again* as Inspector Clouseau in a pirate captain disguise "undercover" on the waterfront singing "yo-ho-ho and a bottle of rum;" (f) Peter Boyle in *Honeymoon in Vegas* singing songs from the Rogers and Hammerstein musical *South Pacific* to delay Nicholas Cage; (g) Dustin Hoffman and Sidney Pollack in *Tootsie* in the Russian Tea Room when Pollack first realizes that the woman sitting

next to him is his client Hoffman; (h) Rowan Atkinson in *Bean* when he is in police custody and he is looking at himself in the one way mirror and acting like a seven year old.

PART FIVE:

FINAL OBSERVATIONS

From the mid 1940's to today, we can observe some changes in American films. First, our morays have loosened. I'm not going to offer a moral judgment about whether this is good or bad, but from a purely dramatic standpoint it is destructive. Can you see why? If nothing is taboo, then where does internal angst come from? And if there is no internal angst, then how can there be real drama between the characters in a film? Consider the emotions that are on display from Kirk Douglas and Eleanor Parker in *Detective Story* from 1951 over the fact that she, his wife, turns out not to have been a virgin when they got married. Today, it's pretty much expected that when most folks get married they aren't virgins and even that they may have had same-sex relationships or multiple partner relationships. It's freedom, but in a weird way it can reduce the excitement. There was a time when men would get excited when a woman showed her bare knees (or even ankles). Today, it takes a heck of a lot more to get a man's attention, at least on the video or film screen. When nothing is taboo, how can you be naughty?

Another change is that the target audience today is younger and part of it is outside the United States. That favors certain screenplays over others. It also changes the film industry from pure Americana, to something more globalist.

Another change is the extremely high cost of modern films, which makes risk taking and deviation from standard formulas much harder to "greenlight" (get the thumbs up for a go to production). And finally, as we all noticed, the actors have changed. In the days of the studio system, they looked for special people who not only could act different, but who were different. It wasn't just a matter of looking for someone who used to be a model in a magazine or television commercial. The camera doesn't lie and if you aren't an interesting person to begin with, it doesn't matter how good an actor you are. One of the trademarks of an actor is that you can see them thinking—that the performance comes from the inside and works its way out. Today, I see some actors talking, phrasing and gesturing, but mostly from the surface or with obviously ginned up emotions, with very little real thought behind it. Of course, part of the problem is the writing. You can't blame an actor if the story and the dialogue are garbage. They can act up a storm, but will still end up looking stupid.

Can we then lay all blame on the writers? Not really. It isn't all that easy to come up with new material for screenplays when so much writing has been done in the past.   That is why so often when we go to the movies today, we feel a sense of déjà vu. But the bottom line is that without good writing and a decent search for the truth about what makes us human, our

movies just aren't going to be very satisfying. Now, we must acknowledge that there is an observation bias problem in that when we look into the past we see only the cream of the crop that someone has bothered to re-release on a new medium. Back in the day, there was plenty of garbage being produced along with the few gems. Same thing today. Same thing with all art, or academic research, or whatever. So we shouldn't be unduly hard on ourselves. I just have the sneaking feeling that in film, we Americans have the same problem we have in many other areas of our endeavors—we are relying too much on technology and not enough on wisdom.

To circle back to the idea of subjectivity in interpreting anything, but particularly art, I am going to spew my opinions on few key topics—including, but not limited to, the best actor and actress and the best films and comedies of all time. Am I right? Maybe not, but it is my belief that by disagreeing on these topics, we can find our way to deeper understanding. And anyway, lists can be fun.

So here goes….

Best male film star: Gregory Peck, Kirk Douglas, William Holden, Paul Newman, Richard Burton, Harrison Ford.

Best female film star: Audrey Hepburn, Eleanor Parker, Faye Dunaway, Ava Gardner.

Eight examples of great cinematography: *The Verdict* (Andrzej Bartkowiak), *Barry Lyndon* (John Alcott), *Superman: The Movie* (Geoffrey Unsworth), *Days of Heaven* (Nestor Alamendros), *The Deer Hunter* (Vilmos Zsigmond), *Schindler's List* (Janusz Kaminsky), *Hud* (James Wong Howe), *Splendor in the Grass* (Boris Kaufman).

Best editing: *Jaws* (Verna Fields), *Back to the Future* (Michael Kahn).

Nine great film scores: *Close Encounters of the Third Kind* (John Williams), *Chinatown* (Jerry Goldsmith), *Star Trek: The Wrath of Khan* (James Horner), *The Untouchables* (Ennio Morricone), *On Her Majesty's Secret Service* (John Barry), *To Kill a Mockingbird* (Elmer Bernstein), *Predator* (Alan Silvestri), *Crimson Tide* (Hans Zimmer), *The Silence of the Lambs* (Howard Shore).

Great additional excerpts from film scores: Main Title from *Superman: The Movie* (John Williams), Main Title from *Raiders of the Lost Ark* (John Williams), Main Title from *1941* (John Williams), Main Title from *Basic Instinct* (Jerry Goldsmith), Main Title from *Alien* (Jerry Goldsmith), Main Title from *Star Trek: First Contact* (Jerry Goldsmith), Main Title from *The Wind and the Lion* (Jerry Goldsmith), Main Title from *The Omen* (Jerry Goldsmith), Main Title from *Capricorn One* (Jerry Goldsmith), "Maybe My Luck Has Changed" from *King Kong* (John Barry), "All Time High"(orchestral version) from *Octopussy* (John Barry), Main Title from *Forest Gump* (Alan Silvestri), Main Title from *Back to the Future* (Alan Silvestri), Main Title from *Gorky Park* (James Horner), Main Title from *The Seventh Voyage of Sinbad* (Bernard Hermann), Main Title from *North by Northwest* (Bernard Hermann), Main Title from *The Magnificent Seven* (Elmer Bernstein), Main Title from *Lawrence of Arabia* (Maurice Jarre), Main Theme from *Dune* (Toto),

Main Theme from *Batman* (1989) (Danny Elfman) [note some similarity between the themes from *Batman* and *Dune*].

<u>A dozen great films</u>: *Show Boat* (1951), *To Kill a Mockingbird, Goodfellas, Jaws, The Verdict, Miller's Crossing, Casablanca, The Towering Inferno, The Right Stuff, The Outlaw Josey Wales, Hard Times* and *The Electric Horseman*.

<u>Eighteen great comedies</u>: *The Lavender Hill Mob, The Canterville Ghost (1944), The Pink Panther Strikes Again, Blazing Saddles, Sleeper, 1941, Ghostbusters, Uncle Buck, Back to the Future, The American President, Tootsie, Where the Heart Is (1990), Big Trouble in Little China, Back to School, Wayne's World, Bean* and *Galaxy Quest*. Now, you might ask why I left out *Animal House* and *Revenge of the Nerds*? Both hilarious, but also maybe a bit too reliant on nudity. I don't mind it, but some did. What about the films by David and Jerry Zucker and Jim Abrams, such as *Airplane, Top Secret* and *The Naked Gun*. All extremely funny, but the plots are imperfect. I don't think you can do that kind of humor and expect a perfect plot, anyhow. But the parts for Robert Stack in *Airplane* and Omar Sharif in *Top Secret* are hilarious beyond the normal.

<u>Films that tell us something key about America</u>: *Show Boat, To Kill a Mockingbird, The Alamo, The Right Stuff, The American President, The Last Picture Show, American Graffiti, The Great Santini, Chinatown, The Godfather Parts 1 and 2, Twilight's Last Gleaming, Goodfellas, Reversal of Fortune, The Informant* and *Quiz Show.*

<u>Other films (not discussed elsewhere herein) which I can recommend (even though I may not be able to completely justify the entire film)</u>*: Cape Fear (1961), Roman Holiday, Sabrina, The Searchers, North by Northwest, The Enemy Below, Elmer Gantry, The Manchurian Candidate, The Hustler, Lolita, Spartacus (Kirk Douglas), Mary-Queen of Scots (Vanessa Redgrave), Frenzy, Five Easy Pieces, Robin and Marian, The Wind and the Lion, The Shootist, Rollerball, The China Syndrome, King Kong (Jessica Lange), Star Wars Episodes 4-6, Close Encounters of the Third Kind, Star Trek: The Wrath of Khan, The Elephant Man, Alien, Excalibur, The Sunshine Boys (Matthau), The Goodbye Girl (Dreyfuss), The Boys From Brazil, Animal House, Raiders of the Lost Ark, Trading Places, An Officer and a Gentleman, John Carpenter's The Thing, Witness, The Road Warrior, High Road to China, FX, No Way Out, The Hunt for Red October, Breaker Morant, Tequilla Sunrise, Miller's Crossing, The Dresser (Albert Finney), Total Recall, Under Siege, Starman, Lethal Weapon 2, The Lawnmower Man, Amadeus, Broadcast News, Beetlejuice, Black Rain, Other People's Money, The Rocketeer, Star Trek: Generations, Star Trek: First Contact, The Island of Dr. Moreau (1996), Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade, Batman Forever, X2: X-Men United, Point of No Return, The Hit, The Grifters, Falling Down, The Remains of the Day, Medicine Man, Sky Captain and the World of Tomorrow, The Fifth Element, L.A. Confidential, Gladiator, Mission Impossible 2, The Game, Star Trek (2009 reboot), The Departed, Copland, The Ring, Eastern Promises, Skyfall, Mission Impossible: Rogue Nation* and *Valerian and the City of a Thousand Planets.*

<u>Foreign films which I can recommend (even though I can't completely justify the entire film)</u>*: 8 and ½* (Fellini)*, Summer With Monika* (Bergman), *Diva* (Beineix), *Das Boot* (Wolfgang Petersen), *Cinema Paradisio* (Tornatore), *Indochine* (Warnier)*, Amelie* (Jeunet*)* and *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* (Ang Lee), *I'm In The Mood for Love* (Kar-Wang) and *Operation Cromite* (J.H. Lee).

<u>Guilty Pleasures: Grade B Films Which Are Fun to Watch (but which aren't necessarily for kids or the penitent)</u>: *Frankenstei*n (Boris Karloff), *Where the Sidewalk Ends, Touch of Evil, Forbidden Planet, Barbarella, The Green Slime, Brides of Dracula* (Hammer Films), *The Seventh Voyage of Sinbad, Jason and the Argonauts, Godzilla versus the Thing, Audrey Rose, The Island of Dr. Moreau (1977), Flash Gordon (1980), Altered States, The Hunger, Swashbuckler, Blue Velvet, The Hidden, Revenge of the Nerds, Highlander, From Beyond, Reanimator, The Puppet Masters* (1994/Donald Sutherland) and *The Arrival* (Charlie Sheen)*.*

That's my opinion and I am thankful to be an American who is entitled to have an opinion and express it publicly.

Finally, let's circle back to the idea from the Renaissance that art holds the mirror up to Nature. The question is: does it even have to be as pretentious as that? Doesn't the pure entertainment value of a film matter in its own right, as an escape, as a source of renewal and refreshment, as a chance to think about something other than yourself and your own problems, a sharing with others? Entertainment has intrinsic value and even as I try to show some of the deeper aspects of some films, I would suggest that a film is good if you enjoy it and if others don't, well too darn bad. I think I can more or less prove that I'm not stupid, so if I happen to like a film that the arty-farty snobs don't like such as *The Green Slime*, well maybe some people shouldn't be too quick to judge the perceptions of others. And finally, an observation for which I have zero empirical evidence. Children need play to develop and to imagine. It could be that films are part of play for adults, part of the way we ideate and imagine and by doing so, shape our world. Before there can be change, one must dream of the change. Actions follows ideas.

So after all that I have said so far, what is the bottom line for a writer who wants to write a screenplay? If you don't care about your characters and what happens to them (or at least empathize with them), the audience won't either. If the audience isn't on the side of the main character fairly soon after the film begins, the film could be in trouble. There was an old joke about being a director that the actors would always ask "what's my motivation?" Well, that's no joke. The screenwriter must know the motivation, goal, objective, desires of the characters and the screenplay must make more or less continuous forward motion in that direction.   So if you are a budding writer, think less about genre or action sequences and more about human psychology and emotion and the actions and events that give rise to those human reactions, or arise therefrom.

My penultimate comment comes from Shakespeare. Two of the most beautiful images are described by a person on the stage, but the events have already occurred in the past off stage, and the audience must conjure the image for themselves.   These are: (a) Anthony and

Cleopatra on Cleopatra's barge as described by Enobarbus in II,ii of *Anthony and Cleopatra;* and (b) Ophelia's death as described by the Queen in IV, vii of *Hamlet, Prince of Denmark*. In movies we like to see things flashing in front of our eyes, but the question for the screenwriter is: must it always and ever be so?

I will leave you with one piece of film dialogue that I consider important. It's from the *Silence of the Lambs* (adapted by Ted Tally from the Thomas Harris novel) when the two FBI trainees are speaking about the worrisome fact that the serial killer Hannibal Lechter has just escaped. *Clarice Starling*: "He won't come after me." *Ardelia Mapp*: "Oh, really?" *Clarice Starling*: "He won't. I can't explain it. He would consider that rude." Why does that matter? Because there is a deep truth to the idea that the one thing people owe each other is basic courtesy and politeness because it is an admission that the other person is a human being with dignity who is entitled to that minimum gesture. Even if you don't like them, even if you disagree with them, even if your interests are adverse to theirs, even if you are natural enemies, even if you aren't the best person—you can at least show that you're better than just any animal crawling around on the planet by not being rude. We have gotten ourselves into a view that relationships follow from emotions, when in fact emotions follow partly from the various duties that we may owe to each other from time to time.

And with that, I end this discussion and wish you well with your movie-going and screenwriting.

Appendix: Partial Lists

What follows are a few lists of some of my favorite things in film (in no particular order).

Best directors: Fredrico Fellini (*8 and ½, La Dolce Vita*), Stephen Spielberg (*Jaws, Close Encounters of the Third Kind, Raiders of the Lost Ark, Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade, Minority Report*), Martin Scorcese (*Mean Streets, Goodfellas, The Departed*), Alfred Hitchcock (*Rear Window, North by Northwest, To Catch a Thie*f), David Lean (*Lawrence of Arabia, Bridge Over the River Kwai, A Passage to India*), Stanley Kubrick (*The Killers, Spartacus, 2001: A Space Odyssey, A Clockwork Orange, The Shining*), Sidney Lumet *(12 Angry Men, Dog Day Afternoon, The Verdict, Q&A*), Norman Jewison (*The Thomas Crown Affair, Rollerball, Other People's Money*), Don Siegel (*The Invasion of the Body Snatchers, Dirty Harry, The Shootist*), Milos Forman (*One Flew over the Cuckoo's Nest, Hair, Amadeus, The People Versus Larry Flynt*), John Boorman (*Deliverance, Excalibur, The Exorcist 2, Where the Heart Is*), George Roy Hill (*Hard Times, The Sting, Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid, The Great Waldo Pepper*), John Guillerman *(King Kong, The Towering Inferno, The Blue Max*), John McTiernan (T*he Hunt for Red October, Die Hard, Predator, The Thomas Crown Affai*r), Stephen Frears (*Dangerous Liaisons, The Hit, The Grifters, Dirty Pretty Things*), Joel Cohen (*Blood Simple, Miller's Crossing, Fargo*), Terence Malick (*Badlands, Days of Heaven, The Thin Red Line*); Ridley Scott (*Blade Runner, Alien, Black Rain, Gladiator*).

Important directors: Jules Dassin (*Night and the City, The Canterville Ghost*), Billy Wilder (*It's a Wonderful Life, Mr. Smith Goes to Washington, Double Indemnity, Love in the Afternoon*), Fred Zinnemann (*High Noon, Julia, Day of the Jackal),* John Ford (*The Grapes of Wrath, The Searchers, Mogambo*), John Huston (*The Asphalt Jungle, The Treasure of the Sierra Madre, The Man Who Would Be King, Prizzi's Honor*), John Frankenheimer (*The Manchurian Candidate, The Island of Dr. Moreau*), Robert Wise (*The Sound of Music, West Side Story, The Haunting of Hill House, The Day the Earth Stood Still*), and, not to excuse his disgraceful role in McCarthyism, Elia Kazan (*Rebel Without a Cause, On the Waterfront, East of Eden, Splendor in the Grass*).

Best screenwriters: Dalton Trumbo (*Roman Holiday, Spartacus*), Alvin Sargent *(The Stalking Moon, Julia, Ordinary People*), Robert Towne (*Chinatown, Tequilla Sunrise*), Harold Ramis (co-wrote *Ghostbusters, Stripes, Back to School*), Lawrence Kasdan (*The Big Chill, The Empire Strikes Back, Raiders of the Lost Ark, Romancing the Stone*), Bob Zemeckis (co-wrote *1941 and Back to the Future, Forest Gum*p), Joel and Ethan Cohen (*Miller's Crossing, Raising Arizona, Fargo*), Aaron Sorkin (*A Few Good Men, The American President*), William Goldman (*Marathon Man, Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid, The Great Waldo Pepper*).

Best cinematographers: Vilmos Zsgimond (*The Sugarland Express, Close Encounters of the Third Kind, The Deer Hunter*), Janusz Kaminsky (*Schindler's List, Catch Me As You Can*), Nestor Alamendros (*Days of Heaven, Apocalypse Now, Tucker*), William A. Fraker (*1941, The Island of Dr. Moreau (1996))*, James Wong Howe (*Hud, Picnic*), Geoffrey Unsworth (*2001: A Space Odyssey; Superman*), John Alcott (Barry Lyndon, *The Shining, No Way Out*), Gordon Willis (*The Godfather I and II*), Ralf D. Bode (*Gorky Park, Coal Miner's Daughter*), Bill Butler (*Jaws*), Freddie Young *(Lawrence of Arabia, Mogambo*), Michael Balhaus (*Goodfellas*, The Fabulous Baker Boys, Bram Stoker's Dracula, Quiz Show, The Departed*), Jan DeBont (*Die Hard, The Hunt for Red October, Black Rain, Basic Instinct*), Peter Suschitzky (*Where the Heart Is (1990), The Empire Strikes Back, Eastern Promises*), Hiro Narita *(Star Trek: The Undiscovered Country, The Rocketeer*), Andrzej Bartkowiak (*The Verdict, Prizzi's Honor, Falling Down*), Boris Kaufman (*On the Waterfront, Splendor in the Grass*).

Best editors: Michael Kahn (*Close Encounters of the Third Kind, Back to the Future*), Thelma Schoonmaker (*Goodfellas, Casino, The Departed*), Paul Hirsch, Marcia Lucas & Richard Chew (*Star Wars: A New Hope*), Verna Fields *(Jaws*), George Tomasini (*North by Northwest, Cape Fear, The 7 Faces of Dr. Lao*); William H. Reynolds (*The Sound of Music, The Godfather, The Sting, The Turning Point*).

Best film composers: John Williams, Jerry Goldsmith, John Barry, James Horner, Elmer Bernstein, Hans Zimmer, Howard Shore.

Best Shakespeare adaptations: *Much Ado About Nothing* and *As you Like It* (Kenneth Branagh), *Hamlet at Elsinore* (with Christopher Plummer and directed by Philip Saville), *Richard III* (1995/Ian McKellan).

Notable acting (the most moving performances are in bold): **Gregory Peck** *(The Keys to the Kingdom, The Great Sinner, Mirage, **To Kill a Mockingbird**, The Stalking Moon, I Walk the Line, The Omen, The Boys From Brazil)*, **Al Pacino** (***Godfather Part 2**, Serpico, Dog Day Afternoon, Scent of a Woman)*, Robert De Niro (*Taxi Driver, The Deer Hunter, Raging Bull, Goodfellas)*, **James Mason** (*Five Fingers**, Lolita**, North by Northwest, The Verdict, 20,000 Leagues Under the Sea*), Humphrey Bogart (*Casablanca, Sabrina, The African Queen*), **Robert Shaw** (***The Luck of Ginger Coffee**, From Russia With Love, A Man For All Seasons, The Battle of Britain, Jaws, Robin and Marian)*, **Kirk Douglas** (*Paths of Glory, **Spartacus**, Detective Story, The Arrangement, Lust for Life, **The Fury**)*, **Michael Douglas** (*Wall Street, The American President, Black Rain, Basic Instinct, **Falling Down**, The Game*) , Sissy Spacek (*Carrie, Coal Miner's Daughter, Badlands)*, **Peter O'Toole** (***Lawrence of Arabia**, The Lion in Winter, The Ruling Class, My Favorite Year)*, Angela Landsbury (*The Manchurian Candidate*), Piper Laurie (*Carrie, The Hustler*), **Meryl Streep** (*The Deer Hunter*, **Sophie's Choice***, The Devil Wears Prada*); Lee Remick (*Days of Wine and Roses, The Competition, The Omen*), Faye Dunaway (*Bonnie and Clyde, The Thomas Crown Affair, Chinatown, Network, The Towering Inferno, The Eyes of Laura Ma*rs), Jacqueline Bisset (*Day for Night, The Deep, Class*), Jack Nicholson (*Chinatown, The Last Detail, Five Easy Pieces, One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*), Kate Nelligan (*Eye of the Needle, Dracula, The Prince of Tides*), Richard Boone (*The Arrangement, The Alamo*), Anthony Quinn *(Lawrence of Arabia)*, **Edward Woodward (*Breaker Morant*)**, Gabriel Byrne (*Miller's Crossing, The Usual Suspects, Point of No Return*), Clint Eastwood (*Dirty Harry, The Outlaw Josey Wales, Unforgiven, Million Dollar Baby*), Tom Hanks (*Apollo 13, Forest Gump*), John Wayne (*The Quiet Man, The Searchers, The Alamo*), Sidney Poitier (*To Sir With Love*), Alice Krige (*Chariots of Fire, Ghost Story, Star Trek: First Contact*), Christopher Plummer (*The Sound of Music, Hamlet at Elsinore, The Battle of Britain, Murder by Decree, Hanover Street, Star Trek: The Undiscovered Country*), Marlon Brando (*Viva Zapata, A Streetcar Named Desire, On the Waterfront, The Chase, The Godfather, The Missouri Breaks, Superman*), **Anthony Hopkins** (*The Lion in Winter, QBVII, A Bridge Too Far, Audrey Rose, The Elephant Man, Magic, The Silence of the Lambs, **The Remains of the Day***), **Robert Duvall** (*To Kill a Mockingbird, Godfather 1 & 2, Apocalypse Now, The Great Santini, Colors, **Falling Down**, Lonesome Dove*) Patrick MacGoohan (*Dr. Syn: Alias the Scarecrow, Scanners, Braveheart*), **Blythe Danner** (***The Great Santini***), Glenn Ford (*Superma*n), **Rosalind Russell** (*Picnic, Auntie Mame*), Joan Crawford (Mildred Pierce), Marcello Mastroanni (*8 and ½),* **Catherine Deneuve** (*Belle du Jour, The April Fools, **Indochine***), **William Holden** (*Picnic, Sabrina, Bridge Over the River Kwai, Network, **The Towering Inferno***), Edward Fox *(The Day of the Jackal, Force 10 from Navarone, Ghandi, The Dresser*), Albert Finney (*Two for the Road, Scrooge, Murder on the Orient Express, The Dresser, Miller's Crossing*), Alec Guinness (*Lawrence of Arabia, Bridge on the River Kwai, Star Wars, Tinker Tailor Soldier Spy, A Passage to India*), **Lawrence Olivier** (*Wuthering Heights, Spartacus, Sleuth, **Marathon Man**, The Boys From Brazil*), **William Hurt** (*Altered States, **Gorky Park**, Broadcast News*), James Stewart (*It's a Wonderful Life, Rear Window*), Katherine Hepburn (*The African Queen, The Lion in Winter, On Golden Pond*), **Audrey Hepburn** (*Roman Holiday, Love in the Afternoon, **Sabrina**, Unforgiven, The Nun's Story, Breakfast at Tiffany's, Two for the Road, Robin and Marian*), Elizabeth Taylor (*Cleopatra,*

Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf), **Richard Burton** *(Cleopatra, Night of the Iguana, The Spy Who Came in From the Cold,* **Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf***)*, **Ava Gardner** (**Show Boat**, Earthquake, Night of the Iguana, Mogambo, On the Beach, The Barefoot Contessa), **Sean Connery** (*Goldfinger, From Russia With Love,* **The Wind and the Lion***, The Hunt for Red October, The Untouchables, Highlander*), **Michael Caine** *(The Battle of Britain, Sleuth,* **The Man Who Would Be King***, The Hand*), **Jeff Bridges** (*King Kong,* **Starman,** *Tucker, The Great Lebowski, Hell or High Water*), Martin Landau (*North by Northwest, Cleopatra, Tucker, Ed Wood*), John Hurt (*A Man For All Seasons, King Lear, Alien, The Elephant Man, The Hit, Scandal, Contact*), Dustin Hoffman (*The Graduate, Papillon, Marathon Man*), Anne Bancroft *(The Miracle Worker, The Elephant Man, The Turning* Point), Jean Simmons (*Spartacus, The Big Country, Elmer Gantry*), Richard Dreyfuss (*American Graffiti, Jaws, Close Encounters of the Third Kind, The Goodbye Girl, The Competition*), **Michael Moriarity** (**Bang The Drum Slowly**), Christopher Walken (*The Dead Zone, A View to a Kill*), Alan Rickman (*Die Hard, Quigley Down Under*), Jeremy Irons (*The French Lieutenant's Woman, Dead Ringers, Reversal of Fortune*), George C. Scott (*The Hustler, Dr. Strangelove, Patton, Rage, Hardcore*), **Burt Lancaster** (*From Here to Eternity,* **Elmer Gantry***, Unforgiven, Twilight's Last Gleaming, Scorpio, The Island of Dr. Moreau, Field of Dreams*), Max Von Sydow (*The Exorcist, Three Days of the Condor, Minority Report*), Deborah Kerr (*From Here to Eternity, The King and I, The Arrangement, Night of the Iguana*), Ed Harris (*The Right Stuff, State of Grace, The Abyss*), **Paul Newman** *(The Hustler, Hud, Cool Hand Luke, The Towering Inferno,* **The Verdict***)*, **Gene Hackman** *(The French Connection,* **The Conversation***, Superman, Crimson Tide, Unforgiven),* Robert Mitchum *(Night of the Hunter, Cape Fear, The Enemy Below, The Friends of Eddie Coyle, The Winds of War (television), Scrooged),* Robert Redford *(Three Days of the Condor, The Great Waldo Pepper, The Sting, The Electric Horseman),* Steve McQueen *(The Great Escape, Bullitt, The Getaway, Papillon, The Towering Inferno),* Charles Bronson *(The Great Escape, Hard Times),* **Harrison Ford** *(Blade Runner, Witness,* **Working Girl***, The Fugitive, Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade),* Richard Widmark *(The Alamo, Night and the City, The Bedford Incident, The Final Option),* Veronica Cartwright *(Alien, The Right Stuff),* Scott Glenn (*The Right Stuff, The Hunt for Red October, The Silence of the Lambs*), Claude Rains (*Casablanca, Lawrence of Arabia*), Murray Hamilton (*The Hustler, Jaws*), **Martin Sheen** (*Badlands, Apocalypse Now,* **Wall Street***, The American President*), **Eleanor Parker** (**The Sound of Music,** *Detective Story*), Joanne Woodward (*The Three Faces of Eve*), James Dean (*Rebel Without a Cause*), Nick Nolte (*Prince of Tides, Q&A, The Thin Red Line*), Ray Liotta (*Goodfella*s), Michelle Pfeiffer (*Tequilla Sunrise, The Fabulous Baker Boys),* Mel Gibson *(The Road Warrior*), Harrison Ford (*Witness, Blade Runner, Presumed Innocent, Working* Girl), Sam Shepard (*Days of Heaven, The Right Stuff*), **Jessica Lange** (*King Kong,* **Frances**), Johnny Depp (*Edward Scissorhands, Black Mass*), Ralph Fiennes (*Schindler's List, Quiz Show*), Louis Gossett, Jr. (*An Officer and a Gentleman*), Lawrence Harvey (*The Manchurian Candidate, The* Alamo), Tommy Lee Jones (*The Executioner's Song, Under Siege, The Fugitive*), James Caan (*Rollerball, Flesh and Bone*), Oskar Werner (*Ship of Fools, The Spy Who Came in From the Cold*), Nigel Terry (*Excalibur*), Will Patton (*No Way Out, Return of the Titans*), Diane Baker (*Mirage, Silence of the Lambs*), Cliff Robertson (*Three Days of the Condor, Charly, Class*), Robert Vaughn (*Bulllit, The*

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Towering Inferno), Denzel Washington (*The Mighty Quinn, Glory, Crimson Tide*). Elizabeth Ashley (*Ship of Fools*), Debra Winger (*Terms of Endearment, An Officer and a Gentleman*), Jodie Foster (*The Silence of the Lambs, Contac*t), Julia Roberts (*The Pelican Brief*), Genevieve Bujold (*Earthquake, Choose Me, Dead Ringers*), Charlton Heston (*Ben Hur, The Ten Commandments, The Big Country, The Planet of the Apes, Soylent Green, The Omega Man, Earthquake*), **Tom Hulce** (*Animal House, **Amadeus***), Russell Crowe (*Master and Commander, L.A. Confidential, Gladiator*), Edward Norton (*Primal Fear, The Score),* Julia Ormond *(Smilla's Sense of Snow),* Kevin Costner *(No Way Out, The Untouchables, Field of Dreams, Bull Durham),* **Karen Allen** *(Animal House, Raiders of the Lost Ark, **Scrooged**),* **Timothy Dalton** *(**Mary-Queen of Scots**, Flash Gordon, The Living Daylights, The Rocketeer),* Raul Julia *(Kiss of the Spider Woman, Presumed Innocent, Tequilla Sunrise),* Kurt Russell (*Escape from New York, The Thing, Big Trouble in Little China, Tequilla Sunrise*), Warren Beatty (*Bonnie and Clyde, Shampoo, Reds*), Rob Lowe (*Class*), Ricardo Montalban (*Star Trek: The Wrath of Khan*), Grace Kelly (*Rear Window, To Catch a Thief*), Vanessa Redgrave (Camelot, Mary Queen of Scots, Julia), Jane Fonda (*The China Syndrome, Julia*), Tom Skerritt (*Alien, The Turning Point*), John Gielgud (*The Elephant Man, Chariots of Fire, Arthur*), Rod Steiger (*On the Waterfront, In the Heat of the Night, No Way to Treat a Lady*), Julie Andrews (*The Sound of Music, Mary Poppins*), Ian Holm (*Mary Queen of Scots, Robin and Marian, Alien, Chariots of Fire, The Fifth Element*), Claire Bloom *(The Haunting, The Spy Who Came in From the Cold,* Lesley Ann Warren *(Cop, Choose Me, Victor/Victoria),* Francesca Annis (*Dune*), Annette Bening (*The Grifters, The American President*), Geena Davis (*The Fly, Thelma and Louise*), Marcia Gay Harden *(Miller's Crossing*), Lance Henriksen (*Aliens*), Ronny Cox (*Taps, Grey Lady Down, Robocop, Total Recall*), Dabney Coleman *(On Golden Pond*), Gary Sinise (*Forest Gump*), Hal Holbrook (*Capricorn One, The Fog, Wall Street*), Peter Boyle (*Friends of Eddie Coyle, Hardcore*), Richard Jordan (*Logan's Run, The Friends of Eddie Coyle, Dune, The Hunt for Red October*), Jason Robards (*Julia, All the President's Men*), Val Kilmer (*Batman Forever, The Island of Dr. Moreau*), Morgan Freeman (*Unforgiven, Million Dollar Baby*), Edward Binns (*Twelve Angry Men, The Verdict*), Paul Schofield (*A Man for All Seasons, Scorpio, Quiz Show*), James Earl Jones (*The Great White Hope, Star Wars, The Hunt for Red October*), John Colicos (*Scorpio, The Postman Always Rings Twice),* Brian Cox *(Manhunter, X2),* Pat Hingle *(Splendor in the Grass, The Grifters),* Lorraine Bracco *(Goodfellas),* Jack Warden *(Shampoo, The Verdict),* Roy Scheider *(Jaws, Marathon Man, All That Jazz),* David Warner *(Tom Jones, The Omen, Time After Time, The Island, Tron, Star Trek: The Undiscovered Country),* Ruth Gordon *(Rosemary's Baby);* Naomi Watts *(King Kong, The Ring, Eastern Promises),* Sharon Stone *(Basic Instinct, Casino),* Sam Neil *(Dead Calm, The Hunt for Red October),* Dan O'Herlihy *(Fail Safe, MacArthur, The Last Starfighter, A View To A Kill),* M. Emmet Walsh *(Blood Simple, Blade Runner*), Harvey Keitel (*Mean Streets, Thelma and Louise, Copland*); Pierce Brosnan (*Mister Johnson, The Tailor of Panama*); Peter Ustinov (*Spartacu*s), John Forsythe (*And Justice For All*), Charles Bronson (*The Great Escape, Hard Times*), Kurt Russell (*Escape from New York, The Thing, Tequila Sunrise*), James Whitmore (*The Asphalt Jungle*), Dennis Hopper (*Blue Velvet*); Sterling Hayden (*The Asphalt Jungle, The Killing, Dr. Strangelove, The Godfather*), Melvyn Douglas (*Hud, Being There*), Charles Bickford (*The Big Country, The Unforgiven*), G.D. Spradlin (*The Godfather 2, Apocalypse*

Now), Peter Cushing (*The Horror of Dracula, Star Wars: A New Hope*), Toshiro Mifune (*Rashomon, Red Sun*), Gong Li (*Memoirs of a Geisha*), James Hong (*Chinatown, Big Trouble in Little China, Blade Runner*), Ken Watanabe (*The Last Samurai, Memoirs of a Geisha, Inception*), George Takei (*Star Trek: The Undiscovered Country*).

Notable comedy acting: Rick Moranis (*Ghostbuster*s), Mike Meyers (*Wayne's World*), John Candy (*Uncle Buck*), Rodney Dangerfield (*Caddyshack, Back to School*), Bill Murray (*Caddyshack, Ghostbusters, Scrooged*), Dan Akroyd (*Ghostbusters, 1941, The Blues Brothers, Trading Places*), Harvey Korman (Blazing Saddles), John Belushi (*Animal House, The Blues Brothers*), Ted Knight (*Caddyshack*), Tom Hanks (*Big*), Dabney Coleman *(9 to 5, Where the Heart Is, Tootsie, Short Time*), Peter Boyle (*Young Frankenstein, Honeymoon in Vegas*), Woody Allen (*Sleepe*r), Peter Sellers (*The Pink Panther Strikes Again, Return of* the *Pink Panther, Being There*), Jerry Lewis (*The Nutty Professor*), Dustin Hoffman (*Tootsie*), Leslie Nielsen (*Airplane, The Naked Gun*), Robert Stack (*Airplane, 1941),* Jane Fonda *(Barefoot in the Park, 9 to 5, Fun With Dick and Jane, Monster in Law),* Tim Allen *(The Santa Claus, Galaxy Quest),* Adam Sandler *(Happy Gilmore),* Kurt Russell *(Big Trouble in Little China),* Gene Hackman *(Young Frankenstein, Superman),* Madeline Kahn *(Young Frankenstein),* Teri Garr *(Young Frankenstein, Tootsie),* Bob Barker *(Happy Gilmore),* Alan Rickman *(Galaxy Quest),* John Vernon *(Animal House*), William Atherton (*Ghostbuster*s), Sigourney Weaver (*Working Girl*), Michael Keaton (*Mr. Mom, Beetlejuice*), Alec Baldwin (B*eetlejuic*e), Geena Davis (*Beetlejuic*e), Christopher Lloyd (*Back to the Future*), Crispin Glover (*Back to the Future*), Alec Guinness (*The Lavender Hill Mob*), Walter Matthau (*The Sunshine Boys*), Richard Benjamin (*The Sunshine Boys*), Gloria Swanson (*Sunset Boulevard*), Sidney Pollack (*Tootsie)*; Albert Brooks (*Broadcast News*); Val Kilmer (*Real Genius, Top Secret*); Al Pacino (*Dick Tracy*).

Most Versatile Actors: Gregory Peck (*The Keys to the Kingdom, To Kill a Mockingbird, The Omen, The Boys From Brazil, The Big Country, The Stalking Moon, MacArthur*); Michael Douglas (*Romancing the Stone, Black Rain, Basic Instinct, The Game, The American Presiden*t); Alec Guinness (*The Lavender Hill Mob, Lawrence of Arabia, The Bridge Over the River Kwai, Scrooge, Star Wars, A Passage to India*); Marlon Brando (*A Streetcar Named Desire, On the Waterfront, Viva Zapata, The Chase, The Godfather, The Missouri Breaks, The Formula, The Island of Dr. Moreau*); Albert Finney (*Tom Jones, Murder on the Orient Express, Two for the Road, Scrooge, Miller's Crossing, The Dresser*), Johnny Depp (*Edward Scissorhands, Pirates of the Carribean, Black Mass*).

Movie Actress Beauties: Maureen O'Hara, Rita Hayworth, Gene Tierney, Ava Gardner, Eleanor Parker, Elizabeth Taylor, Grace Kelly, Audrey Hepburn, Tippi Hedren, Lee Remick, Faye Dunaway, Jacqueline Bisset, Lois Chiles, Jessica Lange, Brooke Shields, Catherine Zeta-Jones, Sharon Stone, Margot Robie, Taylor Cole, Jessica Pare.

Foreign Actress Beauties: Alida Valli, Catherine Deneuve, Anouk Aimee, Claudine Auger, Luciana Paluzzi, Fanny Ardant, Genevieve Bujold, Carole Bouquet, Isabella Scorupo, Audrey Tautou, Gong Li, Ziyi Zhangi, Maggie Cheung Man-Yuk, Park Min-Young.

Television Beauties: Barbara Eden, Cheryl Ladd, Lynda Carter, Priscilla Barnes, Connie Selleca, Sela Ward.

Annoyingly Good Looking Actors (you just know they're gonna get the girl-and you just aren't): Alain Delon, Robert Redford, Paul Newman, Robert Wagner, Sean Connery, Warren Beatty.

Most Urbane Actors: Claude Rains, James Mason*,* Joseph Cotton, Cary Grant, George Sanders*.*

Most Underrated Actors: Michelle Pfeiffer, Kate Nelligan, Eleanor Parker, Lesley Ann Warren, Diane Baker, Gene Tierney, Kristin Scott Thomas, Peter Boyle, Martin Landau, Tom Skerritt, Sam Waterston, Cliff Robertson, Richard Lynch, Scott Glenn, Robert Forster, James Remar and (yes) Timothy Dalton.

Worst Acting Ever (by a well-known actor): Steve Railsback (*Lifeforce*), George Clooney (*Batman & Robin*), Forest Whitaker (*Battlefield Earth*), Hayden Christiansen (*Star Wars Episodes 4, 5, 6*).

Bad Films that Critics Love: *Citizen Kane* (Welles), *Vertigo* (Hitchcock), *Breathless* (Goddard), and *The Piano* (Champion). Lots of innovative camera work in *Citizen Kane*, but the screenplay is super boring. *Vertigo* is nice to look at, but mainly due to a good director of photography aided by Hitchcock (who had a good eye) and some nice scenery from San Francisco and the surrounding area. The story is absurd beyond all recognition*. Breathless* is a choppy mess with a hairy, graceless star. *The Piano* made me nauseous and I didn't even eat at the snack bar. I found it boring and full of gratuitous, pointless shots and scenes. It also had very little to do with music, which I consider a form of marketing misrepresentation.

Wish-Casting. Finally, I wish to offer some of my personal "wish-casting" ideas. Someone once said the saddest things are those that might have been. Well, here goes nothing: (a) Burt Lancaster as Captain Kirk; (b) Kyle McLaughlin as Steve McGarrett; (c) Tom Hulce as Lt. Kaffee in *A Few Good Men*; (d) Michael Moriarity or Ed Harris as Colonel Jessup in *A Few Good Men*; (e) John Cassavetes as Jack Torrance in *The Shining*; (f) Sean Young as Catwoman in *Batman Returns* (not to take away from Michelle Pfeiffer's fine performance); (g) Stephen Rea instead of Hugh Grant as Chopin in *Impromptu*, (h) Fox Business' Trish Regan as Emma Peel in *The Avengers*; (i) Patrick Stewart instead of Al Pacino as Shylock in *The Merchant of Venice*; and (j) Denzel Washington and Jessica Chastain in *Othello*. With perhaps Timothy Dalton as Iago (Christopher Plummer played the part on stage a long time ago and he probably can't be beaten for the role). And by the way, on a slightly different topic, why did no one ever record a single of Robert Mitchum singing "Home on the Range?"

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About the Author

Lloyd Lim has worked in government and business as a manager and a lawyer. For over a decade, he oversaw a small family business founded by his parents. He also has extensive experience in business law and has helped to implement various government interventions in the market. He has a BA in English literature from Columbia University, a JD from UCLA, a MBA from the University of Hawaii at Manoa and holds the CPCU designation. He has written five nonfiction books*: Reinventing Government: A Practitioner's Guide (2010), Basic Stuff That Everyone Should Know (2012), Beyond Obamacare: Solving the Healthcare Cost Problem (2014), No More Stupidtry: Insights for the Modern World (2016)* and *Business Tools, Not Platitudes--including staff training modules (2017)*.   He has also written several short essays on government and the market.