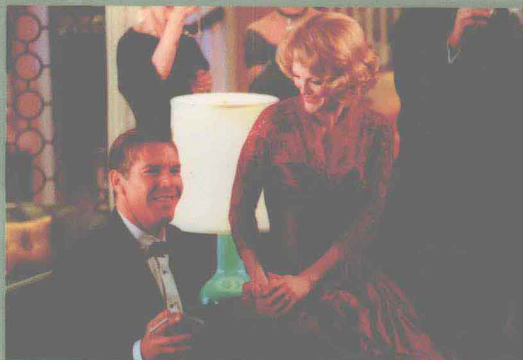
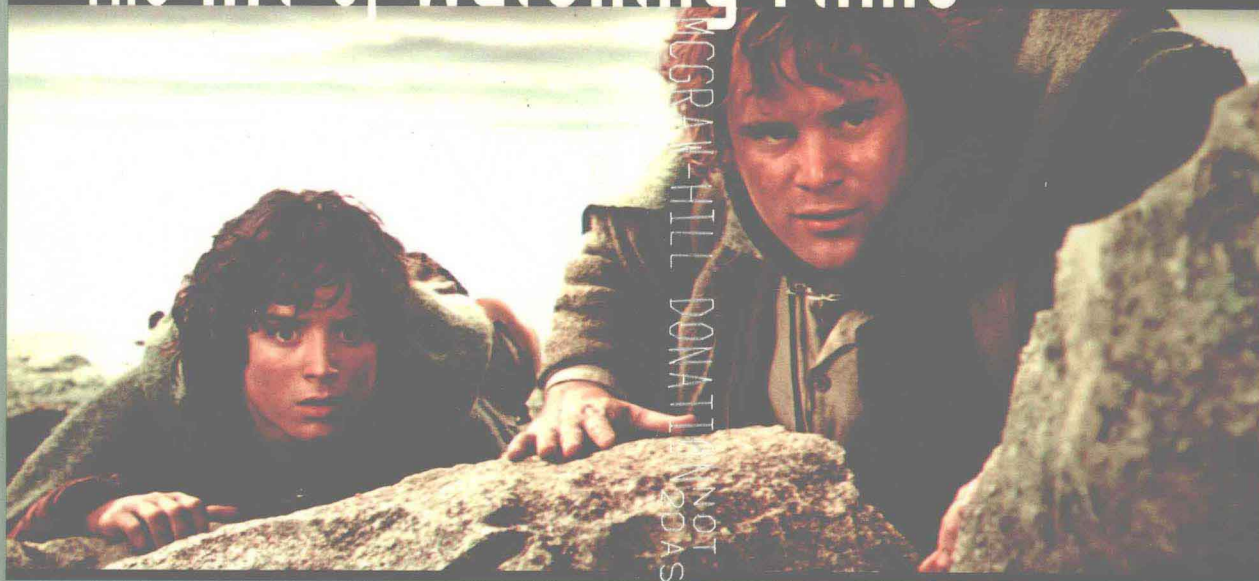




Sixth Edition



The Art of Watching Films



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2005ASAD06

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Dennis W. Petrie

The Art of Watching Films

SIXTH EDITION

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THE ART OF WATCHING FILMS

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1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 0 DOC / DOC 0 9 8 7 6 5 4 3

ISBN 0-07-255626-9

Vice president and Editor-in-chief: Thalia Dorwick

Publisher: Christopher Freitag

Senior sponsoring editor: Melody Marcus

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Composer: Thompson Type

Typeface: 10.5/13 Janson

Paper: 45# New Era Matte

Printer and binder: R.R. Donnelley

Cover photos: *The Lord of the Rings: The Two Towers* © New Line Cinema/courtesy Everett Collection; *Gangs of New York* © Miramax/courtesy Everett Collection; *Far From Heaven* courtesy Everett Collection; *My Big Fat Greek Wedding* courtesy Everett Collection.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Boggs, Joseph M.

The art of watching films / Joseph M. Boggs, Dennis W. Petrie.—6th ed.

p.cm.

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 0-07-255626-9

1. Film criticism. I. Petrie, Dennis W. II. Title.

PN1995.B525 2003

791.43'01'5—dc21

2003045885

The Internet addresses listed in the text were accurate at the time of publication. The inclusion of a Web site does not indicate an endorsement by the authors or McGraw-Hill Higher Education, and McGraw-Hill does not guarantee the accuracy of the information presented at these sites.

The Art of Watching Films

Once again,
for
Elizabeth Petrie Gill
and
Robert D. Briles

Preface

Approach

Never before have movies been so readily available to all those who wish to watch them. When the first edition of this book was published, students' viewing opportunities were mostly limited to local theaters, classrooms with 16mm projection capabilities, or television. Since then, cable and satellite television, VCRs and laserdisc players have dramatically widened our choice of films to see and ways to see them. Most recently, DVDs have offered home viewers both improved visual and sound quality and content "extras" such as commentaries by directors, actors, writers, editors, cinematographers, and other filmmakers, and "making of" documentaries. Perhaps most useful to the study of film, DVDs allow direct digital entry to individual scenes so that we can now scrutinize a film sequence by sequence, shot by shot, and even frame by frame.

What are we to make of this greater access to movies? What purpose does it serve? We share the conviction of reviewer Roger Ebert, who calls movies "the most important art form of our time":

I believe movies can be noble and good for the soul. They are empathy machines, allowing us for an hour or two to understand a little of what it would be like to be somebody else. To be a different race or gender or religion, or live at another time or under other politics. They help to make us citizens of mankind.

Of course most movies are shallow or silly, but sometimes there are movies that shake us up and make us deeper and better. [www.suntimes.com/output/eb-feature/cst-nws-ebert23.html; 23 March 2003].

This textbook is informed by the belief that just as there is an art to filmmaking, there is an art to watching films. Our primary goals are to challenge students to sharpen their powers of observation, help them to develop the skills and habits of perceptive watching, and encourage them to discover complex aspects of film art that they might otherwise overlook. We have designed this text to complement any film studied; its analytical framework can be applied to

films as distinctly different as *The Grapes of Wrath*, *Talk to Her*, *Chicago*, *The Matrix Reloaded*, *My Big Fat Greek Wedding*, and *The Pianist*.

Organization

In its formal organization and intent, *The Art of Watching Films* is as straightforward as possible, with a focus on narrative film. A newly revised first chapter offers a rationale for film analysis while providing suggestions for deepening film appreciation from day one of the course. The text then develops a foundation for understanding theme and story (Chapters 2 and 3) and moves on to discuss dramatic and cinematic elements (Chapters 4–11). Chapter 12 provides a framework for integrating knowledge of all these elements into an analysis of the whole film. Subsequent chapters (13–16) explore special topics: adaptations, genre films, remakes, and sequels; foreign language, silent, documentary, and animated films; and censorship.

Features

Examples From American Films

Because *The Art of Watching Films* is an introductory text, most of its examples of concepts and techniques are drawn from contemporary American films that students are likely to have seen. However, the book also includes examples from American film classics, which are discussed in a way that does not assume prior knowledge. We examine films from other countries, documentaries, and animated films in a separate chapter that can form the basis for several classes.

More than 500 images from contemporary and classic films illustrate key points in the text. Extensive, informative captions strengthen the link between the visual and textual examples.

Video Exercises

End-of-chapter video exercises offer a hands-on immediacy to the study of film. Assuming that most students have at least limited access to a VCR, we have devised video exercises for nine of the chapters in the text. To view the section of film dealt with in each exercise, set the VCR counter at “0000” (or the real-time counter at 0:00:00) at the very end of the studio logo, just as the “movie proper” begins. (The “movie proper” includes such things as “Paramount Pictures Presents,” opening credits, and the main title). Then fast-forward until the numbers given in the exercise appear. (For examination of comparable scenes on any available DVD, merely follow the descriptive references in the “chapters” indicator of the main menu.)

Writing About Film

Many instructors ask students to write about the films they watch—either informally in a journal or formally in an essay to give structure and logic to their own critical responses. In this text’s Web site (<http://www.mhhe.com/awf6>), we offer guidelines for writing a film analysis and three sample student essays. The first is a lengthy, complete examination of John Ford’s *The Grapes of Wrath*, showing how a student might approach a paper assigned as a major class project. The second is a shorter, simpler paper focusing on important techniques employed in Martin Scorsese’s *Taxi Driver*. Both of these essays illustrate the types of analysis that one might expect students to write by using this text and a video source for multiple viewings. So that students using this book can grasp the interrelationship of the text, film, and finished essay, we have noted in the margins of both papers the pages in *The Art of Watching Films* that helped each student writer. The third student essay is a sharply focused analysis of Scorsese’s *The Age of Innocence* without textual annotations.

Controversy

The text introduces students to controversial issues that profoundly affect the films we see, including censorship (Chapter 16) and the cinematic liberties taken in fact-based films like *Quiz Show*, *Mississippi Burning*, *JFK*, *A Perfect Storm*, and *A Beautiful Mind* (Chapter 13).

New—Questions for Analyzing Film Themes and Techniques

Questions at the end of every chapter help students apply chapter concepts to the analysis of any film. They increase students’ involvement in the film experience, encouraging them to participate actively in an exciting quest rather than responding passively to the surface details.

New—Mini-Movie Exercises

Chapters 3 through 16 also provide students with exercises for examining a short film or “cinema sampler” (part of a feature film that is virtually “self-contained”). These exercises permit scrutiny of “complete,” unified works rather than just fragmented bits and pieces of a feature-length film. They should be especially helpful to students and teachers who must necessarily work within very limited periods of time.

New—DVD Filmmaking Extras

Chapters 3 through 16 now contain annotated lists of topic-specific materials about the filmmaking process to be found on DVD versions of many movies.

In addition, instructions are given for locating many “Easter eggs” (special hidden features) on DVDs.

New—Revised and Expanded Coverage of Genre Films

Chapter 14 now contains a new, less restrictive approach to genre films. Definitions have been revised and expanded, including additional references from various scholars of genre films. Also, Chapter 14 includes a concentrated section on the recent explosion of fantasy films in world cinema.

New—Updated Bibliography

New works of both scholarship and popular appeal expand and improve the listings in “Selected Bibliography and Study Materials.” This material is on the Web site: <http://www.mhhe.com/awf6>.

Web Site and Test Bank

The Web site accompanying *The Art of Watching Films* can be found at <http://www.mhhe.com/awf6>. Included here are online exercises, interactive quizzes, Web links, a guide to writing about film, a list of suggested readings, and a glossary of key terms from the book. For instructors, there is a revised Test Bank prepared by Frank Beaver of the University of Michigan. In addition to test questions, this supplement contains a list of sources for DVD/video rentals. To receive a copy of the Test Bank, adopters should contact their local McGraw-Hill sales representative.

Acknowledgments

Many hours and more energy are required to complete a project such as this sixth edition of *The Art of Watching Films*. No one person could accomplish it alone. Thus, again I am very grateful to scores of people who made my task easier and faster.

I continue to feel immensely blessed for having known and worked with Joe Boggs; his shared friendship, great good humor, and wisdom were (and still are) among my most prized possessions. And now, also, I wish to thank Nancye Boggs for her kindness and generosity.

Once more, I extend heartfelt thanks to my family, friends, colleagues, and students who have so often given me their unflagging encouragement and help. For special thanks I must, of course, round up the usual suspects, without whom I would have fallen. Unceasingly, Thomas P. Tierney, Sue Van Wagner,

and Robert D. Briles honored and gladdened me with their true-blue support. Likewise, Michael Blaz, Deborah Blaz, Carol L. Briles, Miriam J. Briles, Ray A. Condon, Miles Hession II, Roberta Tierney, and Jane A. Tubergen all offered me the wonderful gifts of their friendship, creative suggestions, and cheerful aid. Jeanne Braham, Chris C. McEvoy, Jacqueline E. Orsagh, Robert C. Petersen, and Sandy S. Ridlington posted cyber- and snail-mail encouragement aplenty. Jane Graves, bless her, raised my spirits by personally delivering not only Marilyn Monroe and W. C. Fields but Mae West, as well. I thank Robert Whelchel for talking Jim Jarmusch and Philip Glass to me, and Sean Carroll for keeping me well stocked with Stanley Kauffmann. To Marcia Adams I wish to express my appreciation for her gracious references to my work in her own books.

Among my former students, I especially want to thank Denise Tomlinson for permission to print her essay on *The Age of Innocence*, which appears on this book's Web site.

At McGraw-Hill, publisher Chris Freitag and sponsoring editors Melody Marcus and Allison McNamara (along with editorial coordinator Ashaki Charles) have helped considerably in my text's journey from Mayfield Publishing Company. I would also like to acknowledge art editor Emma Ghiselli, photo editor Nora Agbayani, and copy editor Sheryl Rose for their expert support. And production editor Brett Coker has been especially kind and swift in his skillful and enthusiastic making of this book. Most of all, I wish to offer my sincere thanks to development editor Cynthia Ward, whose creativity, professionalism, and energy I admire and from whose wise and patient spirit my own work has greatly profited.

Finally, I thank David Shaw and his students for their corrective suggestions, and all of my colleagues who served as reviewers for this edition: Scott Baugh, Texas Tech University; Larry Behrens, University of California, Santa Barbara; Charles Bretan, Northwood University; Peter Bukalski, Southern Illinois University, Edwardsville; Rick Chapman, Des Moines Area Community College; Kimberly Chin, Bakersfield College; Darrell Copp, Scottsdale Community College; Sue Cross, Mission College; Robert Dudash, Lorain County Community College; Jim Dykman, Salt Lake Community College; Jeff Harris, Somerset Community College; David A. Holden, Alan Hancock College; Clark Hutton, Volunteer State Community College; Julie King, University of Wisconsin, Parkside; Misty Knight, University of the Ozarks; Cynthia Marshall, The Community College of Beaver County; Joan McGettigan, Texas Christian University; Daniel Pal, Moraine Valley Community College; David Popowski, Minnesota State University at Mankato; J. Michael Pressler, Shippensburg University; Dave Shaw, Broward Community College; and Cheryl Weiss, Allan Hancock College.

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