

MOVIES

Why Movies Get the Ratings that They Do

By Michael Gallagher
New York (NC) — Periodically it is good to go over the principles that we, the staff of the Department of Communication of the U.S. Catholic Conference, bring to bear when we evaluate and classify movies.

The classifications

themselves are A-I — general patronage; A-II — adolescents and adults; A-III — adults; A-IV — adults, with reservations (the comma is very important since it obviates the little joke about phoning the box office ahead of time and thus being able to attend a racy movie with a

clear conscience); and O — morally offensive.

The classifications are essentially negative in nature. An A-I, for example, merely indicates that a movie has nothing at all that could cause a problem for any viewer regardless of age. It says nothing positive about the movie and by no means should be taken as an indication that you're sure to find it entertaining.

Since 1980, however, there has been at least one positive element to the system, the designation "recommended" immediately after the classification. But given the quality of movies these days, we get few chances to use this. The most recent occasion was "Tender Mercies," which came out early last year. ("Chariots of Fire" and "Gandhi" were earlier recipients.)

The reviews that we write size up the movie in both aesthetic and moral terms. We never classify a movie without reviewing it. These classifications should be taken as a substitute for a review only if you have no other choice.

Our review will not only explain why a movie was given a particular classification but where within the particular category the movie stands. Is a particular A-III — adults, for example, closer to being an O — morally offensive, or an A-II — adolescents and adults? Only a review will tell you.

Let's take some specific examples.

A-I has become the rarest of classifications, limited mostly to cartoon features — though we've been obliged in recent years to give even some cartoon features, "Fire and Ice," for example, well-merited O classifications.

The only film currently on our list with an A-I is "Joni," an extremely well-done inspirational film made by Billy Graham's organization. "Chariots of Fire," three years ago, also got an A-I classification, and here we were more tolerant than the Motion Picture Association of America which withheld its G, general patronage, and gave it a PG, parental guidance, on account of a few Cockney vulgarities used by station porters in an early scene.

A-II movies are also rare, but they do occur. "Betrayal," a film about adultery based upon a play by Harold Pinter, which had quite a successful run in what Variety calls the "art house circuit," received an A-II despite its subject matter, something that might raise a few eyebrows.

We gave "Betrayal" an A-II, because it was a seriously intended movie (even if shallow in execution), and, as you might guess from the title, it did not take a benign view of adultery even though it was far from viewing adultery in the context of Catholic moral theology. Finally, there was no nudity or graphic sex in it.

"The Big Chill," "Educating Rita," "Reuben, Reuben," "Terms of Endearment," "Uncommon Valor," "Under Fire," and "Yentl" are all A-III movies. You would, however, have to read our reviews to find out their relative place within the A-III category and our estimate of their aesthetic quality.

Our reviews, for example,

had grave reservations about both "The Big Chill" and "Terms of Endearment." We judged that both were superficial and had flawed moral outlooks, but we also felt that they would present no problems to mature viewers.

"Reuben, Reuben," "Educating Rita," and "Under Fire" though better films and more humane, nonetheless dealt with moral issues (and in the case of "Under Fire" political issues as well) in such a way as to rule out younger viewers. The issues with "Yentl" and "Uncommon Valor," as

different as they are from each other, are more simple and straightforward.

"Uncommon Valor," a sleeper success at the box office which our review called "a run-of-the-mill action picture raised a notch or two by an intelligent script and the presence of Gene Hackman," got an A-III simply because of its violence. "Yentl," a pleasant and entertaining movie, has no violence or graphic sex nor is there any difficulties with its moral outlook. It got an A-III simply because of the complications that arise

when its heroine dresses up as a man.

(Editor's Note: Shortly after Gallagher filed the above story it was learned that the Motion Picture Association of America, unhappy with its present ratings system, has announced it will publish short descriptions of the objectionable parts of the movies it classifies. That was an alternative to creating a new category between PG and R. As it now stands, the industry acknowledges that virtually all of its ratings fall into the two categories, and none too comfortably. Alas.)



Next Winner?

Tracey Ross, Brooklyn-born model who has been appearing on the nationally televised program, "Star Search," demonstrates one of her many moods for the camera, an ability thought by many to make her a major contender for the program's grand prize of \$100,000, during a "Star Search" broadcast in Rochester, Saturday, Feb. 25.

Japanese Detention In WW2 Is Probed

By Henry Herx
New York (NC) — One of the many moral contradictions of World War II was the American government's decision to intern some of its own citizens solely on the basis of race. The consequences of this wartime "emergency" are still with us today, as shown in "Invisible Citizens: Japanese-Americans," a documentary airing Sunday, Feb. 26, 10-11 p.m. EST on PBS.

It was in February 1942 that President Roosevelt issued an executive order declaring the West Coast a military zone. Over 100,000 Japanese-Americans were then removed from the area and sent to detention centers in the desolate wastes of the Southwest.

Housed in wooden barracks with few amenities, surrounded by barbed wire and armed military guards, the internees had to bear the harsh physical conditions of life in the camps. Even more devastating, however, was the psychological damage caused by being uprooted from home, isolated from normal society and treated as an enemy of America.

To prove that they were loyal and true Americans, many young men in the camps volunteered for military service. Most were sent to fight in Europe with the 442nd, one of the most decorated units of the war.

Describing the patriotism that motivated these Japanese-American soldiers, whose motto was "Go For Broke," is a surprisingly unembittered veteran who was blinded fighting in France and, as we learn from a neighbor, is still the subject of prejudice from some in the community.

Those in the camps as well as their children today still suffer from the guilt of being singled out as potential traitors, while Americans of German and Italian descent were undisturbed.

The psychological toll of this on Japanese-Americans is spelled out in heart-breaking detail by those interviewed in the program. "For the first 27 years of my life I was utterly ashamed of being Japanese," is a typical statement describing the effect of those years.

Produced by Keiko Tsuno, the documentary provides the human context to this sorry bit of American history that most of us would rather forget. Young Japanese-Americans are determined that this injustice be acknowledged and some form of reparation be made. The 1981 presidential commission that held hearings on the matter agreed. But the question of compensation for property losses estimated at \$400 million, to say nothing of the mental and emotional suffering of the internees, is still unresolved.

BOOKS

"The Soviet Union Today, an Interpretive Guide," edited by James Cracraft. Educational Foundation for Nuclear Science — University of Chicago Press (Chicago, Ill., 1983). 348 pp. \$9.95.

Reviewed by James C. O'Neill
NC News Service

This is a book designed to help the general reader go behind the headlines and take a closer look at what life is like in the Soviet Union. It is made up of 26 essays written by specialists in Soviet affairs.

The essays were first published as separate pieces in the Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists. The articles, most of which were by scholars associated with the Russian Research Center at Harvard, are not heavy, academic research pieces. The writers are well-informed and their observations are current enough to include the early months of the latest Soviet premier, Yuri Andropov. By and large it is a readable and informative volume.

To make it easier for the reader, the editor groups the essays under eight topic headings: history, politics, the armed forces, the physical context (geography and environment), science and technology, culture, and society (ethnicity, religion and women).

Although the writers are informed — Cracraft says all of them have "lived in the U.S.S.R. for varying periods of time" — and their articles clearly written, the book as a whole seems smaller than its parts.

Many of the individual articles are excellent. The power of the Communist Party-appointed Writers' Union to dictate style, hero-prototypes and other literary elements as discussed in the chapter on "New Trends in Literature" comes to mind.

The chapter on agriculture is an eye-opener. Especially intriguing is a point made by several authors that the Soviet leadership is under great pressure to provide more and better consumer goods for a population with a growing income and more sophisticated tastes, but to do so means a cutback in military spending and armaments.

There is also an interesting article on Russian nuclear war attitudes that is, in the end, inconclusive.

What robs these articles of their total effectiveness is the fact that the Soviet leadership is wedded to policies of concealment.

Bureaucracy at all levels manipulates facts, figures and people. Statistics on crime or agriculture production, on armaments or health care services often reflect only partial truth or simply no truth at all.

This skewing of factual data extends to the writing of history itself. As Cracraft notes, "In the Soviet Union, as in Soviet Eastern Europe, history has been suppressed." Essays in this book show how both Lenin and Stalin have been manipulated by their successors as the need of the Communist Party leadership dictated. The manipulation of history leads to the control of public opinion.

From that point it is only a step to the altering and falsifying of other information in the name of the supreme good of the state.

When scholars and writers are denied access to records, sound and verifiable data, and reliable sources of information free to talk without fear of retaliation, the books they produce will have to be less than satisfactory.

Nevertheless, this interpretative guide is an excellent starting point for anyone who wants to know more about the Soviet Union.

(O'Neill is a free-lance writer who was NC Rome bureau chief.)

"Embodied in Love: Sacramental Spirituality and Sexual Intimacy," by Charles Gallagher, George Maloney, Mary Rousseau and Paul Wilczak. Crossroad (New York, 1983). 164 pp. \$9.95.

Reviewed by Mitch Finley
NC News Service

A decade ago, when Father Andrew Greeley published his book "Sexual Intimacy," voices from certain sectors of the Catholic community cried out in indignation. How dare he suggest that erotic love is central to the relationship and spirituality of a married couple!

As happens with some frequency, however, Father Greeley was right. It has simply taken others in the Church 10 years to catch up.

"Embodied in Love" is an important contribution to a still nascent understanding of a marital spirituality. It is important if for no other reason than it discusses intelligently the proposition that "a good sex life" is of vital importance to a Christian marriage.

Not only that, but: "Marriage sets the norm for all of Catholic spiritual life;" and: "For Catholics, genital sex is a sacrament, an instrument of grace, not an obstacle to it," which kicks dust in the face of that time-honored but insulting idea that celibacy is superior to marriage.

The authors discuss in some detail the implications of all this for the Church at large. Ministries ought to be concerned with an increase in the experience of intimacy and sexual pleasure among married folk. For, as "Embodied in Love" makes clear, married people first become intimate with God in being intimate with one another.

Okay, so let's say that the foregoing is all true. Just the same, there is more to marriage than sex.

So why spend so much energy talking about it? Don't we need to include the importance of communication, conflict resolution, financial management skills, parenting education, etc., in a married spirituality?

Indeed we do. But without an ongoing healthy sexual intimacy the foundation for all the rest is undermined from the start: "People are at their best, their most unselfish, when they are in love and feeling a high level of sexual awareness of, and desire for, one another."

To paraphrase Father Greeley, those who complain that there is too much sex going on out there are as wrong as they can be.

On the contrary, in most marriages there isn't nearly enough sex going on (at least not of the kind that is deeply loving and passionate). There is a real asceticism, a discipline, demanded of married Christians who would give shared sexual pleasure the place demanded of it by an authentic married spirituality.

The theology of the Trinity which the authors take as their starting point is not helpful. We simply do not have a terminology for discussing this mystery that makes the slightest bit of sense to most people at this point in history.

"Embodied in Love" is anything but another ho-hum book on marriage. It might well be required reading not only for married couples, but for bishops and priests as well.

(Finley is co-author, with his wife Kathy, of "Christian Families in the Real World," to be published by Thomas More Press in March.)