

READING 1: APPROACHES TO BOOK REVIEWING

There are two approaches to book reviewing: the descriptive and the critical. A descriptive review is one in which the writer, without over-enthusiasm or exaggeration, gives the essential information about a book. This is done by description and exposition, by stating the perceived aims and purposes of the author, and by quoting striking passages from the text. A critical review is one in which the writer describes and evaluates the book, in terms of accepted literary and historical standards, and supports this evaluation with evidence from the text.

Here are the American reviewer Rodman Phillbrick's tips for writing a book review.

1. Before you begin writing, make a few notes about the points you want to get across.
2. While you're writing, try thinking of your reader as a friend to whom you're telling a story.
3. Try to mention the name of the author and the book title in the first paragraph — there's nothing more frustrating than reading a review of a great book but not knowing who wrote it and what the title is!
4. If possible, use one paragraph for each point you want to make about the book. It's a good way to emphasize the importance of the point. You might want to list the main points in your notes before you begin.
5. Try to get the main theme of the book across in the beginning of your review. Your reader should know right away what he or she is getting into should they choose to read the book!
6. Think about whether the book is part of a genre. Does the book fit into a type like mystery, adventure, or romance? What aspects of the genre does it use?
7. What do you like or dislike about the book's writing style? Is it funny? Does it give you a sense of the place it's set? What is the author's/narrator's "voice" like?
8. Try using a few short quotes from the book to illustrate your points. This is not absolutely necessary, but it's a good way to give your reader a sense of the author's writing style.
9. Make sure your review explains how you feel about the book and why, not just what the book is about. A good review should express the reviewer's opinion and persuade the reader to share it, to read the book, or to avoid reading it.
10. Research the author and incorporate what you learn into the review. Biographical information help formulate your review, and gives it more depth. A little research on an author can illuminate your understanding of his book.
11. Read your paper through and correct all mistakes in grammar and punctuation.

READING 2: A NEGATIVE REVIEW

***THE LAST FOX: A NOVEL OF THE 100TH/442ND RCT* BY ROBERT H. KONO. (ABE PUBLISHING), 335 PP.**

The 442nd Regimental Combat Team was the most decorated fighting unit in the history of the entire US Army. By the end of World War II, its soldiers had won 18,142 medals for extreme courage, including one Medal of Honor, fifty-two Distinguished Service Crosses, one Distinguished Service Medal, 560 Silver Stars, 4,000 Bronze Stars and 9,486 Purple Hearts. They also won French and Italian honours, including the Croix de Guerre. In June 2001, Bill Clinton hung the Medal of Honor on five survivors and made a further fifteen posthumous presentations to relatives of members of the 442nd RCT.

This is an extraordinary tally, but the men of the 442nd felt they had a great deal to prove. They were all second-generation Japanese Americans (Nisei) insulted by the doubts internment raised about the quality of their patriotism. Their motto “Go for Broke” was no idle slogan. Out of a total force of around 10,000 men, several hundred were killed, 1,700 wounded or maimed.

The numbers more than prove their commitment, but surely there were some in the 442nd who asked if the nation that interned their family really deserved their sacrifice? The official decision to pit them against German forces on the western front is still intriguing. Were there concerns in Washington about the wisdom of having Japanese Americans face the Japanese enemy in the Pacific?

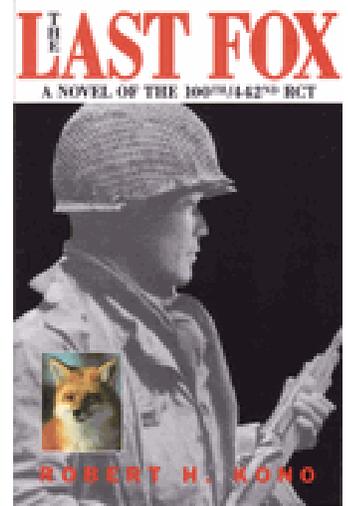
The history of the 442nd invites all sorts of questions about nation and race, about Japanese Americans and mainland Japanese, and about the way we were nearly sixty years ago. There is undoubtedly a great story here waiting to be written, but Robert H. Kono’s *The Last Fox* is not it. This war novel begins so badly, you pray that at some point it will improve. But the writing only gets worse. This is pornography for patriots. Unflinching platitudes. Muddy metaphors. Stock reactions. Wooden characters mouthing perfunctory grit.

Here we are at the regimental reunion with rugged Fred Murano, silver maned Chik Tokuhara and other veterans. “The men fell silent as though a door had slammed shut on the inner mechanism that made lighthearted banter possible, even desirable, especially in the circumstances under which they were struggling to treat the occasion like any other get-together - which it was not.” Small wonder they seldom met.

Naples, Italy, comes with a flash of local colour. “The waters of the Mediterranean Sea were calm and belied the violence of war, the remnants of which crowded the coastline in the form of gutted cities.” In the easy material culture of *The Last Fox*, a city is a remnant and a remnant can crowd.

On we follow in this trail of maimed prose and bleeding metaphor, from Anzio and Monte Cassino up to Rome, Pisa and into France. By the time he staggers over the border to the Cote d’Azur, we are as battle hardened as our hero Fred Murano. Then in Nice, Fred faces his toughest challenge in the form of the lovely Renee (who needs accents?), who says, “Take me now, mon cheri!” the way these French girls do (anything in uniform). But Renee’s sultry allure fails to melt frosty Fred. “You don’t understand, Renee. You are like a rare flower,” says he, cool as a Budweiser.

Today, when the very freedoms that men like Fred Murano fought so hard to defend are



under assault, the United States once again prepares to make common cause against a fanatical foreign foe. And just as they did before, the Europeans want to look the other way and talk appeasement.

All is not lost, however, thanks to *The Last Fox*. Instead of waiting for her fair-weather friends to pitch in, the US should go it alone. All it would take is a crateful of copies of *The Last Fox* dropped on Baghdad Central. No question, faced with three hundred and thirty-five pages of Robert H. Kono's life-threatening prose, Saddam will soon be begging for mercy. Are you listening, Mr. Rumsfeld?

READING 3: PRAISE WHERE PRAISE IS DUE

THE GI WAR AGAINST JAPAN: AMERICAN SOLDIERS IN ASIA AND THE PACIFIC DURING WORLD WAR II BY PETER SCHRIJVERS, (PALGRAVE MACMILLAN), 320PP.

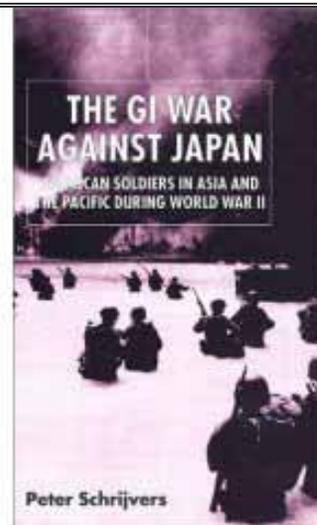
When Japan fired the first shots at Pearl Harbor in December 1941, even her more cautious strategists cannot have imagined the extent to which they and ultimately East Asia would reap the whirlwind. Not only four years of some of the most vicious warfare of the century capped by the two dirtiest bombs ever used on humankind, but also the brushing aside of colonial power by a zealous, hugely motivated fighting corps backed by an industrial establishment unparalleled in its coordination and productivity.

As Peter Schrijvers explains in *The GI War against Japan*, for many GIs the early stages of the war seemed like a state-sponsored tourist trail. Few GIs had much inkling of the world outside their home town, and the journey west was an adventure in itself. The sight of the Pacific Ocean took their breath away. When they took up defensive positions in the Philippines, the GIs were welcomed by natives in canoes, just as Cook and Magellan had been before them. In China, they ran up against people who had never seen Caucasians let alone New Englanders. Everywhere they went the GIs became the focus of huge curiosity.

No wonder the military-issue phrasebooks contained the entry, "Please ask these people staring at me to go away". But as Peter Schrijvers shows in this thoroughly researched cultural history of the American forces in the Pacific War, this early bewilderment soon became a passion to reform. The degradation and poverty the GIs encountered in New Guineau and throughout China aroused a missionary zeal for systemic change.

In the Pacific, the Japanese followed Sun Tzu's ancient prescript to hide 'under the ninefold earth', operating defensive lines from 'spiderweb strongholds whose radiating tunnels connected numerous concealed foxholes to large underground shelters'. Many GIs' worst prejudices were confirmed by an invisible enemy who lived underground and sniped from the trees, and, on Guadalcanal late in 1942, survived on the fleshier portions of his fellow men.

On Okinawa, the American forces abandoned themselves to a long pent-up and escalating rage. Schrijvers' research, much of it taken from soldier's own accounts in diaries and letters home, challenges the polite fiction that the Okinawans committed suicide and killed each other in such



numbers because homeland propaganda had deluded them into thinking that the Americans would rape their women and kill all their men. US soldiers did rape a great many Okinawan women, and, with itchy trigger fingers and the refinement of napalm in their flamethrowers, did kill a great many Okinawan civilians. As for military fatalities, in two months' fighting in Southern Okinawa in 1945, the four divisions of the XXIV Corps took exactly 90 military prisoners.

Did the ordinary grunt know what he was doing when he began pushing the Japanese back across the Pacific and the British back to the Home Counties? Did the ordinary grunt realise when he began pushing the Japanese back across the Pacific that he was also pushing the British back to the Home Counties? Many GIs rejoiced in the fact that they were bringing American hegemony to East Asia. American soldiers took their notions of a sinful, stagnant Asia Pacific from Europe, but liked to see themselves as envoys of what Schrijvers calls 'the pre-eminent redeemer nation', the ultimate model for any aspiring nation throwing off the colonial yoke. As US power crossed the Pacific, the desire to enlighten and regenerate took on more and more force, until a tidal wave of Bible-bashers, sanitation specialists, would-be anthropologists and outright carpetbaggers finally hit the shores of Japan.

As we watch like fascinated rabbits the headlights of the American world empire round the bend of the year and straighten out for another dominant century, what could be more timely than a retrospective of the people who brought the nation to its current pre-eminence? Peter Schrijvers shows us the Greatest Generation at its best and worst. His achievement in this extraordinary synthesis of massive scholarship and empathetic description is to deepen our understanding of the American century and our sympathy for ordinary Americans.

READING 4: WRITING A FILM REVIEW

First, think of an imaginative title for your review. The title gives a very brief idea of the nature of the film and provides a starting point for the reader to focus on. The title might also give an indication of whether the rest of your review will be positive or negative (suggesting if you liked it or not).

Second, in the opening paragraph, give a brief synopsis of the film. You can also state your early opinions here without giving too much away too soon.

After the synopsis, go into detail about what you thought of the film. Was it thought provoking? Did it have lasting images and ideas that particularly enthralled you? Did you think that it was a complete turkey? Whatever your view is, it is important to stress it in a comprehensible manner. Examine the film more closely, try to go into detail about the many ideas contained within the film. What you enjoyed and remembered from the images and ideas in the film are what could be the deciding factor in whether or not the reader actually goes to see the film themselves. If you really enjoyed it or really hated it, make your enjoyment clear.

Say which parts of the film worked for you. Were the setting and atmosphere successful? Did the plot flow all the way through the film or did it become disjointed and messy part of the way through? Look carefully into the characterisation.

A close examination of the key roles in the feature will provide your audience with a better idea of how the film is going to be. Never simply say that you loved or hated a certain movie without giving your reasons. Always explain why you feel the way you do and back up your opinions with

descriptive examples.

Even though your article should show from the start what your opinions are, at the end of the piece you should give a conclusion that states strongly what you thought.

Following these guidelines should provide you with enough information to start writing your own reviews. When you write a good review you should find it rewarding, especially if it is published.

STRUCTURE

1. Title: Make it catchy, and if possible use it to indicate if review will be positive or negative.
2. Paragraph 1: Start to summarise the film and give early indications of your general view
3. Paragraph 2: Start or continue summary, but avoid giving details about the ending or else no one will go to see the film
4. Paragraph 3 and 4: What did you like? Why? Use description, and think about the story, setting, effects and music
5. Paragraph 5 and 6: What didn't you like? Why? Comment on the story, setting, effects and music
6. Paragraph 7 and 8: Talk about the characters. Did you like them? Did the actors play them well?
7. Paragraph 9: Final comments that summarize your view of the film. You may want to write something to get the reader to want to go out and see the film or you might say something to keep them from wasting their money on a ticket.
8. Rating: Give the film a star rating out of 5.

Common terms and phrases used in film reviews

spectacular visual effects, excessive violence, breathtaking, evocative, mood, atmosphere, poorly, unsuccessful, detail, scenery, irresistible, perfect, moments, plot, this movie has been compared to ____ because, wonderful, hilarious, momentum, unexpected plot twists, unbelievable, phenomenal, hype, suspense, disappointing, confusion/confused, fake, imitation, genre, unoriginal, typical, thrilled, was a very moving portrayal, quality of the film, I was impressed by, credible, cliché, a mixture of, classic, captivating

READING 5: "HOW CAN PEOPLE GO ON TALKING ABOUT THE DAZZLING BRILLIANCE OF MOVIES AND NOT NOTICE THAT THE DIRECTORS ARE SUCKING UP TO THE THUGS IN THE AUDIENCE?"

Pauline Kael reviews Stanley Kubrick's "A Clockwork Orange"

From The New Yorker, January 1972.

LITERAL-MINDED IN ITS SEX AND BRUTALITY, Teutonic in its humor, Stanley Kubrick's *A Clockwork Orange* might be the work of a strict and exacting German professor who set out to make a porno-violent sci-fi Comedy. Is there anything sadder - and ultimately more repellent - than a clean-minded pornographer? The numerous rapes and beatings have no ferocity and no sensuality; they're frigidly, pedantically calculated, and because there is no motivating emotion, the viewer may experience them as an indignity and wish to leave. The movie follows the Anthony Burgess novel so closely that the book might have served as the script, yet that thick-skulled German professor may be Dr. Strangelove himself, because the meanings are turned around.



Burgess's 1962 novel is set in a vaguely Socialist future (roughly, the late seventies or early eighties) - a dreary, routinized England that roving gangs of teen-age thugs terrorize at night. In perceiving the amoral destructive potential of youth gangs, Burgess's ironic fable differs from Orwell's *1984* in a way that already seems prophetically accurate. The novel is narrated by the leader of one of these gangs - Alex, a conscienceless schoolboy sadist - and, in a witty, extraordinarily sustained literary conceit, narrated in his own slang (Nadsat, the teen-agers' special dialect). The book is a fast read; Burgess, a composer turned novelist, has an eubellient, musical sense of language, and you pick up the meanings of the strange words as the prose rhythms speed you along. Alex enjoys stealing, stomping, raping, and destroying until he kills a woman and is sent to prison for fourteen years. After serving two, he arranges to get out by submitting to an experiment in conditioning, and he is turned into a moral robot who becomes nauseated at thoughts of sex and violence. Released when he is harmless, he falls prey to his former victims, who beat him and torment him until he attempts suicide. This leads to criticism of the government that robotized him - turned him into a clockwork orange - and he is deconditioned, becoming once again a thug, and now at loose and triumphant. The ironies are protean, but Burgess is clearly a humanist; his point of view is that of a Christian horrified by the possibilities of a society turned clockwork orange, in which life is so mechanized that men lose their capacity for moral choice. There seems to be no way in this boring, dehumanizing society for the boys to release their energies except in vandalism and crime; they do what they do as a matter of course. Alex the sadist is as mechanized a creature as Alex the good.

Stanley Kubrick's Alex (Malcolm McDowell) is not so much an expression of how this society has lost its soul as he is a force pitted against the society, and by making the victims of the thugs more repulsive and contemptible than the thugs Kubrick has learned to love the punk sadist. The end is no longer the ironic triumph of a mechanized punk but a real triumph. Alex is the only likable

person we see - his cynical bravado suggests a broad-nosed, working-class Olivier - more alive than anybody else in the movie, and younger and more attractive, and McDowell plays him exuberantly, with the power and slyness of a young Cagney. Despite what Alex does at the beginning, McDowell makes you root for his foxiness, for his crookedness. For most of the movie, we see him tortured and beaten and humiliated, so when his bold, aggressive punk's nature is restored to him it seems not a joke on all of us but, rather, a victory in which we share, and Kubrick takes an exultant tone. The look in Alex's eyes at the end tells us that he isn't just a mechanized, choiceless sadist but prefers sadism and knows he can get by with it. Far from being a little parable about the dangers of soullessness and the horrors of force, whether employed by individuals against each other or by society in "conditioning," the movie becomes a vindication of Alex, saying that the punk was a free human being and only the good Alex was a robot.

The trick of making the attacked less human than their attackers, so you feel no sympathy for them, is, I think, symptomatic of a new attitude in movies. This attitude says there's no moral difference. Stanley Kubrick has assumed the deformed, self-righteous perspective of a vicious young 5 punk who says, "Everything's rotten. Why shouldn't I do what I want? They're worse than I am." In the new mood (perhaps movies in their cumulative effect are partly responsible for it), people want to believe the hyperbolic worst, want to believe in the degradation of the victims - that they are dupes and phonies and weaklings. I can't accept that Kubrick is merely reflecting this post-assassinations, post-Manson mood; I think he's catering to it. I think he wants to dig it.

This picture plays with violence in an intellectually seductive way. And though it has no depth, it's done in such a slow, heavy style that those prepared to like it can treat its puzzling aspects as oracular. It can easily be construed as an ambiguous mystery play, a visionary warning against "the Establishment." There are a million ways to justify identifying with Alex: Alex is fighting repression; he's alone against the system. What he does isn't nearly as bad as what the government does (both in the movie and in the United States now). Why shouldn't he be violent? That's all the Establishment has ever taught him (and us) to be. The point of the book was that we must be as men, that we must be able to take responsibility for what we are. The point of the movie is much more au courant. Kubrick has removed many of the obstacles to our identifying with Alex; the Alex of the book has had his personal habits cleaned up a bit - his fondness for squishing small animals under his tires, his taste for ten-year-old girls, his beating up of other prisoners, and so on. And Kubrick aids the identification with Alex by small directorial choices throughout. The writer whom Alex cripples (Patrick Magee) and the woman he kills are cartoon nasties with upper class accents a mile wide. (Magee has been encouraged to act like a bathetic madman; he seems to be preparing for a career in horror movies.) Burgess gave us society through Alex's eyes, and so the vision was deformed, and Kubrick, carrying over from *Dr. Strangelove* his joky adolescent view of hypocritical, sexually dirty authority figures and extending it to all adults, has added an extra layer of deformity. The "straight" people are far more twisted than Alex; they seem inhuman and incapable of suffering. He alone suffers. And how he suffers! He's a male Little Nell - screaming in a straitjacket during the brainwashing; sweet and helpless when rejected by his parents; alone, weeping, on a bridge; beaten, bleeding lost in a rainstorm; pounding his head on a floor and crying for death. Kubrick pours on the hearts and flowers; what is done to Alex is far worse than what Alex has done, so society itself can be felt to justify Alex's hoodlumism.

The movie's confusing - and, finally, corrupt - morality is not, however, what makes it such an

abhorrent viewing experience. It is offensive long before one perceives where it is heading, because it has no shadings. Kubrick, a director with an arctic spirit, is determined to be pornographic, and he has no talent for it. In *Los Olvidados*, Buñuel showed teen-agers committing horrible brutalities, and even though you had no illusions about their victims - one, in particular, was a foul old lecher - you were appalled. Buñuel makes you understand the pornography of brutality: the pornography is in what human beings are capable of doing to other human beings. Kubrick has always been one of the least sensual and least erotic of directors, and his attempts here at phallic humor are like a professor's lead balloons. He tries to work up kinky violent scenes, carefully estranging you from the victims so that you can enjoy the rapes and beatings. But, I think one is more likely to feel cold antipathy toward the movie than horror at the violence - or enjoyment of it, either.

Kubrick's martinet control is obvious in the terrible performances he gets from everybody but McDowell, and in the inexorable pacing. The film has a distinctive style of estrangement: gloating closeups, bright, hard-edge, third-degree lighting, and abnormally loud voices. It's a style, all right - the movie doesn't look like other movies, or sound like them - but it's a leering, portentous style. After the balletic brawling of the teen-age gangs, with bodies flying as in a Western saloon fight, and after the gang-bang of the writer's wife and an orgy in speeded-up motion, you're primed for more action, but you're left stranded in the prison sections, trying to find some humor in tired schoolboy jokes about a Hitlerian guard. The movie retains a little of the slangy Nadsat but none of the fast rhythms of Burgess's prose, and so the dialect seems much more arch than it does in the book. Many of the dialogue sequences go on and on, into a stupor of inactivity. Kubrick seems infatuated with the hypnotic possibilities of static setups; at times you feel as if you were trapped in front of the frames of a comic strip for a numbing ten minutes per frame. When Alex's correctional officer visits his home and he and Alex sit on a bed, the camera sits on the two of them. When Alex comes home from prison, his parents and the lodger who has displaced him are in the living room; Alex appeals to his seated, unloving parents for an inert eternity. Long after we've got the point, the composition is still telling us to appreciate its cleverness. This ponderous technique is hardly leavened by the structural use of classical music to characterize the sequences; each sequence is scored to Purcell (synthesized on a Moog), Rossini, or Beethoven, while Elgar and others are used for brief satiric effects. In the book, the doctor who has devised the conditioning treatment explains why the horror images used in it are set to music: "It's a useful emotional heightener." But the whole damned movie is heightened this way; yes, the music is effective, but the effect is self-important.

When I pass a newsstand and see the saintly, bearded, intellectual Kubrick on the cover of *Saturday Review*, I wonder: Do people notice things like the way Kubrick cuts to the rival teen-age gang before Alex and his hoods arrive to fight them, just so we can have the pleasure of watching that gang strip the struggling girl they mean to rape? Alex's voice is on the track announcing his arrival, but Kubrick can't wait for Alex to arrive, because then he couldn't show us as much. That girl is stripped for our benefit; it's the purest exploitation. Yet this film lusts for greatness, and I'm not sure that Kubrick knows how to make simple movies anymore, or that he cares to, either. I don't know how consciously he has thrown this film to youth; maybe he's more of a showman than he lets on - a lucky showman with opportunism built into the cells of his body. The film can work at a pop-fantasy level for a young audience already prepared to accept Alex's view of the society, ready to believe that that's how it is.

At the movies, we are gradually being conditioned to accept violence as a sensual pleasure. The directors used to say they were showing us its real face and how ugly it was in order to sensitize us to its horrors. You don't have to be very keen to see that they are now in fact de-sensitizing us. They are saying that everyone is brutal, and the heroes must be as brutal as the villains or they turn into fools. There seems to be an assumption that if you're offended by movie brutality, you are somehow playing into the hands of the people who want censorship. But this would deny those of us who don't believe in censorship the use of the only counterbalance: the freedom of the press to say that there's anything conceivably damaging in these films - the freedom to analyze their implications. If we don't use this critical freedom, we are implicitly saying that no brutality is too much for us - that only squares and people who believe in censorship are concerned with brutality. Actually, those who believe in censorship are primarily concerned with sex, and they generally worry about violence only when it's eroticized. This means that practically no one raises the issue of the possible cumulative effects of movie brutality. Yet surely, when night after night atrocities are served up to us as entertainment, it's worth some anxiety. We become clockwork oranges if we accept all this pop culture without asking what's in it. How can people go on talking about the dazzling brilliance of movies and not notice that the directors are sucking up to the thugs in the audience?