



## Fact Sheet 4 December 2006

### Media Studies

#### Film Review: *Flags of our Fathers* / *The Departed* / *A good year*

A busy movie review this time. I want to say a few words about several current releases – kind of set you up for the summer break.

By the way, my other crits for this year and last are accessible on the Take Time website so you might like to refresh your memory about those movies before you scurry down to the DVD shop to chase them up.

However, I'd firstly like to share a few thoughts on the issue of age and the people who make movies.

Just by chance, the three current movies which I'll speak about today were all directed by men who are either close to, or, in the case of one of them, well beyond, what used to be regarded as the retirement age.

However, all three are still working effectively at their craft and I hope they do so for a long time to come.

In the same vein, I'll also mention a fourth director, Robert Altman, who passed away recently at the age of 81. In my previous review I discussed his final movie, *A Prairie Home Companion*. This was certainly one of the best of the many movies he directed and a great finale to a notably productive career. He spent his life making movies which carried his own stylistic imprint and, to the end, he was usually referred to as a "Hollywood maverick". Not a bad accolade for an 81 year old.

I find it interesting that the motion picture industry – not only in Hollywood but also in the United Kingdom and some other countries – continues to provide opportunities for creative people to grow and develop even as they themselves grow old.

I like to think – and the results of their work by and large support this – that it's not about hogging the limelight once they are there, but that it's more about the value which the industry places on their hard-won skills and wisdom.

Not too many other industries allow this to happen, and it may be to their detriment. Despite the many opportunities provided for so called "emerging talent" one often finds that it is the grandfathers of the motion picture industry who are continuing to deliver the goods.

There's a thread of mature craftsmanship embedded in their product and this contributes to making satisfying visits to the movies for all of us.

Now to the recent movies by several of these "good old boys".

“Flags of our Fathers”, directed by 76 year old Clint Eastwood, is a tough, sad, beautifully crafted movie which demonstrates how the trauma of war can take hold of those who experience it and affect the rest of their lives.

Cleverly using flashbacks and changes of colour, the movie unfolds the stories of three of the men who were part of one of the best-known photographs of world War Two – the image of a group of United States Marines raising the stars and stripes during the battle for the Japanese island of Iwo Jima in 1944.

Over half of the group in the photograph soon died in the savage fighting on the island, but the three survivors were taken out of the battle zone and whisked back to the United States where they were paraded as heroes but also shamefully exploited as the focus of U. S. Government efforts to raise urgently-needed cash through the sale of war bonds.

The stories of these men – little more than boys in reality – are told in three strands: their horrific battlefield experiences; their sudden catapulting into the public spotlight; and their attempts to return to normal life after the abrupt ending of their short-lived fame.

“Flags of our Fathers” puts a human face on the tragedy of war. I rated it four out of five, but don’t expect a happy ending.

Another current movie which assiduously avoids a happy ending is Martin Scorsese’s *The Departed*.

By the end of this movie there are more bodies on the floor than you would find in the average Shakespearean drama.

I guess we need to expect something like this from Scorsese – the 64 year old master of the mobster genre.

The setting for all of the bloodletting is contemporary Boston, America’s Irish heartland, and the rather sordid plot revolves around Irish cops doing battle with Irish hoodlums.

The plot is of epic proportions. It spans decades of time and is laced with themes of corruption and double-dealing on both sides of the legal divide.

*The Departed* is not a pleasant movie but you might like to consider having a look at it if just to watch the electrifying performances of the three main actors: Jack Nicholson, Matt Damon and Leonardo Di Caprio.

These three are supported by a star-studded group of others and all of them seem to have lifted a notch or two above the usual – no doubt in response to Master Director, Scorsese.

Despite the great performances I felt that the movie was too long to sustain the rather contrived plot and my attention began to flag toward the end. I gave it three out of five.

Now for a very different kind of movie – *A Good Year*. This is a British-made movie set in Provence France and starring Australia’s Russel Crowe. The cast also includes yet another Aussie, newcomer Abbie Cornish, whose confident and appealing supporting performance in this movie should ensure that her career continues on its upward course.

A Good Year was directed by the 69 year old Sir Ridley Scott whose name is not usually linked to romantic comedy.

We tend to associate Ridley Scott with hard-hitting action movies such as “Alien”, “Blade Runner”, “Gladiator” and “Black Hawk Down”.

However, there is nothing creepy or gory about A Good Year – it’s a very pleasant and soothing experience – something akin to sipping slowly on one of the mellow Provencale red wines which form the pivot of the story.

Russell Crowe plays a successful hard-nosed London money-market trader who inherits a charming French vineyard and is suddenly challenged by a potential change of life.

The plot is thickened when Rusty’s wine-buff American cousin, played by Abbie Cornish, turns up to also lay claim to the inheritance.

Further complications arise for Russ when he begins to find himself romantically attracted to a beautiful, but hard-to-get, local woman played by French actress Marion Cotillard.

The movie is also peopled with other interesting characters, in particular Russell’s Uncle Henry – his deceased benefactor – whom we meet in a series of well-placed flashbacks. Uncle Henry is played charmingly by Albert Finney, an actor who seems to be ageing with the appeal of a fine vintage red.

Now, while A Good Year is not a perfect movie there’s not that much to dislike about it.

The dialogue is perhaps not as sharp as we have come to expect from those British romantic comedies like “Love Actually” or “Four Weddings” etc. and, OK, Russell Crowe’s role would have been better handled by either of the Grant boys – Cary or Hugh – and Rusty’s attempts at sustaining an English accent are basically hopeless.

But, hey, worse things have happened in the movies, and, in the end, A Good Year is just plain enjoyable.

I gave it four out of five for being good fun.

Go along and see it soon. It will put you in a good mood for the Happy Christmas which I hope you all will have.

John McGowan  
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