

One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest Movie Review

The Assignment

For this writing assignment, you will create a movie review of director Milos Foreman's film *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*, which is an adaptation of Ken Kesey's novel of the same name. You should assume that you are writing for an online literary magazine¹ that is publishing interesting reviews that focus on looking at films as texts to be studied in detail. In order to be effective and insightful, you should include an analysis of filmmaking conventions (framing, lighting, acting, directing etc.) and develop an argument about the film's effectiveness, honesty, and truth. You must also examine the "message" that the filmmaker wants to convey to the audience and determine whether that message has been successfully conveyed.

Strong reviews accomplish a lot, but they are also very economical so that people reading them can get a great deal of information quickly and efficiently. Therefore, your review should be at least 700 words, and no more than 1000. Please keep in mind that your audience is not a teacher, but is instead readers who enjoy movies. We should assume that some of the potential readers have seen the film and are curious about what others think of its quality, and that some of the readers have not seen the film, and would appreciate a knowledgeable viewer's advice about whether they should go view it or not.

Point Breakdown

Creative Title (5 Points) Catchy, interesting, and effective

Strong Introduction (5 Points) The introduction captivates readers' interest, tells the reader what the review is about, and sets the tone of the review. Be careful to avoid giving away too much.

Guidance (20 Points) The review must help readers decide whether they should view the film or not. A helpful review is supported by specific references, well-organized and easy to follow.

Insight and Persuasiveness (25 Points) The review must include a strong and convincing argument as to whether or not the reviewer liked the work, and whether or not the reviewer would recommend the work to others. Your opinion as the reviewer must be clear and decisive. You should include:

- analysis of stylistic film conventions (framing, lighting, acting, sound, editing, etc.)
- a developed argument about the film's effectiveness, honesty, truth, and message.

Strong Concluding Thought (5 Points) Reviews and articles, more than anything, should conclude with an interesting and witty idea that makes the reader think. Use your wit and play around with a creative way to end your review that leaves a lasting impression on the reader.

Mechanics (10 Points) Double-spaced and free of spelling, grammar and punctuation errors. Between 700 and 1000 words in length.

¹ This online literary magazine focuses on writing (short stories, poetry, novels) as well as interesting, experimental and independent film and music. We should assume that the readership is relatively well bred when it comes to film conventions; therefore you should feel free to use technical film terms (without the need to define or explain them) that help develop your argument.

A Doll's House: About as Mundane as the Name Implies

Reviewed by Lindsey

March 13, 2009

When Henrik Ibsen wrote *A Doll's House* in 1879, he intended to shock his audiences. This cinematic adaptation, directed by Patrick Garland and released in 1973, is less shocking, more soporific. In a brave attempt to stay faithful to the text, Garland has managed to adapt the setting and the script, without the taboo factor that made it worthwhile viewing in the first place.

The movie opens with a single sleigh running over the desolate white space that is Norway in winter. Almost immediately, anyone with knowledge of the play can notice the difference, and the change of tone and identity that is wrought. One of the noteworthy factors in *A Doll's House* that allows the production to feel so enclosed, in tangent with Nora's own emotions, is that every single scene is set in the one place: the Helmers' flat. By having the establishing shot set in such a wide open space, one cannot help but feel a betrayal to Ibsen's masterful work.

This establishing shot sets precedence for the rest of the movie, in the sense that much of Ibsen's subtlety is lost in an attempt to make the 19th century setting more obvious to the modern day viewer. The true distinctiveness of Ibsen's work is in the attention to detail. Ibsen, a stage manager in his early career, is known for making every prop, name, manner of speech and setting work cumulatively, though subtly, to assist the overall thematic nature of his plays. The original published script is littered with stage direction, every scene already envisioned, and every action directed. The movie runs roughshod over these subtleties and details, and some do not even make the cut.

Nora's and Torvald's opening scene, though previously obnoxious, becomes nauseous as Nora, boldly played by Claire Bloom, jumps up and down in an over exaggerated manner, shrieking as Anthony Hopkins' Torvald baits her with money. Similarly, the tale of Anne Marie, the poor maid that had to give up her bastard child, is spelt out much more obviously than in the play, where it is indicated but not actually stated. Furthermore, the scene between Nora and Dr Rank, a magnificent portrayal by Ralph Richardson, is played with an increasingly noticeable slant on their relationship. It even goes so far as to have Rank clumsily kiss Nora, an action that one cannot help but feel Ibsen would have disapproved of, simply because of its blatancy.

The script adaptation fails in capturing the play's essence, but despite this it is not difficult to understand Garland's vision. There are some moments that manage to successfully draw the dated drama into the cinematic world, if they are few and far between. There is an additional scene where Nora, playing hide and seek with the children, is found hiding among the coats by Krogstad, played by a not-quite-creepy-enough Denholm Elliott. The high angle camera focuses on Nora, and then the low angle on Krogstad, emphasising their relationship, and staying true to Ibsen's love of detail. The soundtrack, unadventurous but suitably written by John Barry, corresponds with some haunting music reminiscent of music boxes, and the dolls and toys they are consequently linked to. In the same way, in the concluding scene, when Nora and Torvald finally talk about real and important problems, the camera shows close up shots of their faces, reflecting the move to the heart of the issue.

The soundtrack, as previously noted, is fairly standard, though has one outstanding moment when Torvald irritably opens his letters in the solitude of his study, and the clock ticks and chimes, and other diegetic sounds compile to form an apt and stirring scene. These scenes lead to an understanding of the movie and the vision, if not fulfilled, but there are a few aspects that truly are unforgivable. The inclusion of lines for the children is unnecessary, and the children manage to be grating and irritating, delivering their lines monotonously. There is also a puzzling moment where the eldest child stands wordlessly in the hallway and somehow leaves Nora terrified and unsettled. It is clearly an ill fated attempt to portray Nora's fear of corrupting her children, leaving the most obvious question to be, why couldn't Christopher Hampton, who wrote the screenplay, have left the original scene concerning this issue in instead? The old advice to try to avoid children whilst acting most certainly applies.

As for the cast, they make an admirable effort in face of such a poor screen play, but ultimately manage to create only a few worthwhile moments. Claire Bloom immediately comes across as too old for the childish Nora, and her progression really isn't smooth or believable enough. Hopkins clearly tries, and of all the characters he comes across as most consistent, and most realistic. Both Ralph Richardson and Anna Massey, as the steady Mrs Linde, are underutilized, and, as stated before, Denholm Elliott seems more desperate than creepy. As an ensemble, however, they commendably manage to make decent work from the insipid writing.

After watching this movie, it is worth questioning if it would even be possible to make a successful, true to the original material adaption. A large part of Ibsen's play is the shock factor, but to the modern audience, a woman leaving her husband simply isn't shocking anymore. One cannot help but wish that Garland had been more adventurous with this material, and had tried in some way to adapt it for the modern audience. As it stands, the movie is a poor adaptation of the play, acted valiantly, but with a poor script. It presented itself well in the 19th century, but watching it now one can't help but wish it was less transferred *to* the cinema, and more adapted *for* the cinema.