

When I was eight or nine I was so knocked out by the runaway fairground roundabout at the end of Hitchcock's *Strangers on a Train* that my mother paid for me to go and see it again the following day. I was too young then to catch the perversity underlying the witty deliciousness of the script, which was based on a Patricia Highsmith novel. We lived in a small town in Scotland with two cinemas which changed their programme every week. You went and saw what was on and then it was gone. I didn't know until then that it was possible to see a film more than once.

Today, DVD technology and the back catalogue made it possible to see and own anything from the history of cinema, and the choice is dizzying.

My work as a psychotherapist leaves so little time for reading for pleasure that sometimes I have to escape that Sunday night feeling that Monday is coming and I haven't done my homework by doing the thing I love the most, which is to read scathing reviews of bad movies which I wouldn't be caught dead seeing once, let alone twice.

The doyenne of film criticism was Pauline Kael who shares Orwell's desire to expose a lie, and is not above slapping the odd dumb-ass upstart's head. Of *Sophie's Choice*, she opined that Arthur J. Pakula "didn't write it; he penned it". She would dismiss an entire film as "simpering" and wrote of *The Romantic Englishwoman*, "Tom Stoppard has given the dialogue a few Cowardish bitch-nifties, but

not enough to keep the viewer's blood coursing". What the fuck is a 'bitch-nifty' anyway? Your spellchecker will tell you that she makes words up.

By describing Glenda Jackson's red wigs in *Mary Queen of Scots* as "prankishly terrible", she can put her finger exactly on what is wrong with a film, then wriggle it around until you laugh out loud. Yet Pauline Kael loved movies and championed difficult and subtle films and new directors at a time when merchandising event movies and summer hits had just begun to monopolize the screens of the world. She was able to create a complicity between herself and the reader which makes you feel smart and – God knows – we all like to feel smart.

Who wants to be over-hyped into going to see the latest over-inflated movie star, face lifted so radically he looks like his mother? (Yeah Jackie!) Or the latest Mel Gibson that plays anywhere in the world like a silent movie because nobody cares about the words.

As we get older, we want to direct our attention to where things matter simply because life is shorter. We don't want to follow the crowd to the lowest-common-denominator films which can be watched with the sound down because the cleverness is all in the CGI.

Wait a minute, what am I saying? Maybe we do ...

JOHN BEVERIDGE