



Hooked: Film Writings 1985-1988

Pauline Kael

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The popular New Yorker critic brings movie buffs her ninth collection containing all her reviews since 1985. More than 150 movies are detailed.

Hooked: Film Writings 1985-1988 Details

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Kevin Hinman says

I found this copy of Pauline Kael reviews on the street by the bank and, not having read her before, figured I may as well bring the book home and flip through it. Two things became immediately apparent. First, Kael is a contrarian, not the trolling contrarian that the internet knows so well, but a contrarian born from a woman who has seen every trick a filmmaker can throw at her, and cannot pretend to be tickled by crowd-pleasers. The Princess Bride? Plodding. Empire of the Sun? Mawkish. Aliens? Formulaic. Kael will hate most of your favorites, and she eviscerated many of mine. Luckily, the second thing that becomes apparent while reading "Hooked," is Kael is an excellent writer. There's a reason most people don't read books of movie reviews for pleasure, but Kael turns the form into high art, part synopsis, part criticism, and always with an anxious, exciting prose style. You can feel her pounding the keyboard, the deadline approaching.

She can be mean. Not only about a film that doesn't amuse her, but about the people in the film as well. She never hesitates to mention a woman's appearance, and will rake an actress over the coals if she doesn't look right for the part. It's as if the movies Kael reviews are now hers, and she is free to dismantle them in anyway she sees fit, like a child cutting up a doll's clothing. "What was there in these two hours for me?" she asks, as she cuts and digs, and even in a bad film she may find a moment to herald, a casting choice, or a gag that came out of nowhere and landed.

The collection's finest moments, though, come when Kael unabashedly loves a movie, and you can feel her shock turn to a mad glee as she revisits those cinematic experiences that managed to pierce through her. Blue Velvet. The Unbearable Lightness of Being. Her review of My Beautiful Laundrette was so good, I immediately bought it sight unseen (the movie was good - her review was better). These reviews have the magic of the cinema in them, that energy that's almost palpable when you and a friend push out from a dark theater into the night sky and everything feels fresh and new and revived, because you have seen something great, because that's what movies do.

Paul Dinger says

Her writing is full of unabashed exuberance and love. Her writing was literally the thought process itself. Her opinions are based on solemn observation of film itself, but not just film. She knew books, music, and every other art form as well. In here are wonderful reviews of Shoot the Moon, which I still feel isn't nearly as good as she says, Star Trek II the Wrath of Khan where Riccardo Montalban stole the show and became a true leading man. Blow out which she alone saw as one of John Travolta's greatest performances. This is great book.

Margaret says

One of my fondest memories is visiting the Dutch Rock n Roll Hall of Fame and browsing through their stacks of old music magazines. It was fascinating to pick up and read reviews of now classic albums to see how they were received initially. As with much of my Amsterdam days, I don't remember a lot of specifics. I

do however, remember my friend Gert, who worked there, showing me love letters that the band Golden Earring received from schoolgirls.
Anyway, *Hooked* was like that - a little bit love letter, a little bit revisionist history.

Jason Pettus says

(Reprinted from the Chicago Center for Literature and Photography [cclapcenter.com:]. I am the original author of this essay, as well as the owner of CCLaP; it is not being reprinted illegally.)

Now that I'm finally entering the last phase of my recovery from the bad bicycle accident I had last year, and am up and clicking at full speed again regarding the contemporary books I review on a professional basis, I've decided to start more and more getting through the older books in my reading list as well, the ones that are on there for personal reasons only. And one of the older writers on this list is the late *New Yorker* film critic Pauline Kael, because of having so many people now compare my essays to hers; and in an interesting twist of fate, it turns out that of the twenty or so books she published while alive, the only one in the permanent stacks of my neighborhood library happens to be *Hooked*, covering just the reviews she wrote from 1985 to 1988, a.k.a. my senior year in high school and first couple of years in college, arguably the one period in my life I saw more contemporary movies than any other. (And indeed, of the 175 random films covered in this particular volume, I've seen 75 of them, making it an excellent opportunity to see whether I agree with Kael's taste in movies or not.)

And yes, after finishing this book, I now agree that Kael and I write in a very similar way, although to my haters let me make it clear that *I am not comparing the quality of my writing to Pauline Kael's*; I simply mean that both of us tend to write very long, highly analytical critiques of artistic projects, penned in a funny, conversational style and referencing a lot of history, with neither of us afraid of expressing strong opinions when it's called for. And in this you can see Kael as creating the blueprint for all modern long-form arts analysis, with her influence seen in everyone from the New York Times' Michiko Kakutani to the staff of The Onion AV Club; and that's a very interesting thing, I think, given that in our current world of a million crappy critics who no one pays attention to anymore, Kael is becoming more and more forgotten by the day, and that I imagine many Kaelesque long-form critics like myself have no idea that that's who they're emulating in the first place. Obviously there's a certain inherent datedness in these old books of hers, but I encourage anyone interested in thoughtful artistic analysis to read through some of her work to see how the master did it, and especially concerning the countercultural times of the '60s and '70s when she first made a big splash.

Out of 10: **8.8**
