

British journalist Anthony Lane has been a film reviewer for The New Yorker magazine since 1993. "I'm not a creative writer," he once told an interviewer. "I don't write poetry or novels or drama but criticism, which is the eunuch of the family." In 2001 he received a National Magazine Award for Reviews and Criticism, and in 2002 he published Nobody's Perfect: Writings From The New Yorker (Knopf in the US; Picador in the UK).

In this passage from a review of the film The White Ribbon (2009), Lane compares two kinds of movies: those that merely entertain and those that encourage thoughtful discussion.

Two Kinds of Movies From "Happy Haneke"* by Anthony Lane

As a rough rule, cinema can be sundered into two halves: six o'clock films and nine o'clock films. Most movies are nine o'clock affairs, and none the worse for it. You get home from work, grab something to eat, head to the theatre, and enjoy the show. And so to bed--alone or entwined, but, either way, with dreams whose sweetness will not be crumbled or soured by what you saw onscreen. A six o'clock movie requires more organization: prebooked tickets, a restaurant table, the right friends. You're going to need them, because if all runs according to plan you will spend the second half of the evening tossing the movie--the impact and the substance of it--back and forth. So Persona is a six o'clock movie, though it won't leave you with much of an appetite. As is The Deer Hunter, whereas Platoon, for all its sound and fury, works fine for nine o'clock. The Reader is a nine o'clock movie that thinks it's a six o'clock. Groundhog Day is the opposite. And The White Ribbon? A six-o'clock movie, if ever I saw one.

*"Happy Haneke" by Anthony Lane was published in the October 5, 2009 issue of The New Yorker magazine.

Award-winning essayist and novelist Gretel Ehrlich has said that she's happiest when outdoors, whether on a ranch in Wyoming (The Solace of Open Spaces) or an ice sheet in Greenland (This Cold Heaven). In this paragraph from her first book, she compares two American sports, one distinctly regional, the other national.

Rodeo and Baseball – Comparison in The Solace of Open Spaces by Gretel Ehrlich*

Rodeo, like baseball, is an American sport and has been around almost as long. While Henry Chadwick was writing his first book of rules for the fledgling ball clubs in 1858, ranch hands were paying \$25 a dare to a kid who would ride five outlaw horses from the rough string in a makeshift arena of wagons and cars. The first commercial rodeo in Wyoming was held in Lander in 1895, just nineteen years after the National League was formed. Baseball was just as popular as bucking and roping contests in the West, but no one in Cooperstown, New York, was riding broncs. And that's been part of the problem. After 124 years, rodeo is still misunderstood. Unlike baseball, it's a regional sport (although they do have rodeos in New Jersey, Florida, and other eastern states); it's derived from and stands for the western way of life and the western spirit. It doesn't have the universal appeal of a sport contrived solely for the competition and winning; there is no ball bandied about between opposing players.

*Gretel Ehrlich's *The Solace of Open Spaces* was published by Viking Penguin in 1985.

Best known for his autobiographical studies of English village life in Cider with Rosie and As I Walked Out One Midsummer Morning, Laurie Lee also wrote poems, plays, essays, and travel books. In this excerpt from the essay "Appetite," Lee uses a then-and-now comparison to illustrate his thesis: "One of the major pleasures in life is appetite, and one of our major duties should be to protect it."



from "Appetite"* by Laurie Lee

Fasting is an act of homage to the majesty of appetite. So I think we should arrange to give up our pleasures regularly--our food, our friends, our lovers--in order to preserve their intensity, and the moment of coming back to them. For this is the moment that renews and refreshes both oneself and the thing one loves. Sailors and travelers enjoyed this once, and so did hunters, I suppose. Part of the weariness of modern life may be that we live too much on top of each other, and are entertained and fed too regularly. Once we were separated by hunger both from our food and families, and then we learned to value both. The men went off hunting, and the dogs went with them; the women and children waved goodbye. The cave was empty of men for days on end; nobody ate, or knew what to do. The women crouched by the fire, the wet smoke in their eyes; the children wailed; everybody was hungry. Then one night there were shouts and the barking of dogs from the hills, and the men came back loaded with meat. This was the great reunion, and everybody gorged themselves silly, and appetite came into its own; the long-awaited meal became a feast to remember and an almost sacred celebration of life. Now we go off to the office and come home in the evenings to cheap chicken and frozen peas. Very nice, but too much of it, too easy and regular, served up without effort or wanting. We eat, we are lucky, our faces are shining with fat, but we don't know the pleasure of being hungry any more.

Too much of anything--too much music, entertainment, happy snacks, or time spent with one's friends--creates a kind of impotence of living by which one can no longer hear, or taste, or see, or love, or remember. Life is short and precious, and appetite is one of its guardians, and loss of appetite is a sort of death. So if we are to enjoy this short life we should respect the divinity of appetite, and keep it eager and not too much blunted.

*"The essay "Appetite" by Laurie Lee appears in the collection I Can't Stay Too Long, published by Atheneum in 1976.

Humorist Jean Shepherd is probably best known as the narrator of A Christmas Story (1983), a film based on a number of his autobiographical short stories. His distinctive colloquial prose style grew out of the yarns he frequently told on late-night radio during his many years as a broadcaster.

Here, in the essay-like introduction to his short story "The Endless Streetcar Ride," Shepherd relies on hyperbole to develop a memorable contrast between "them" and "us"--the "stars" and the "numberless ciphers."



from "The Endless Streetcar Ride Into the Night, and the Tinfoil Noose" by Jean Shepherd

Mewling, puking babes. That's the way we all start. Damply clinging to someone's shoulder, burping weakly, clawing our way into life. All of us. Then gradually, surely, we begin to divide into two streams, all marching together up that long yellow brick road of life, but on opposite sides of the street. One crowd goes on to become the Official people, peering out at us from television screens; magazine covers. They are forever appearing in newsreels, carrying attaché cases, surrounded by banks of microphones while the world waits for their decisions and statements. And the rest of us go on to become . . . just us.

They are the Prime Ministers, the Presidents, Cabinet members, Stars, dynamic molders of the Universe, while we remain forever the onlookers, the applauders of their real lives.

Forever down in the dark dungeons of our souls we ask ourselves:

"How did they get away from me? When did I make that first misstep that took me forever to the wrong side of the street, to become eternally part of the accursed, anonymous Audience?"

It seems like one minute we're all playing around back of the garage, kicking tin cans and yelling at girls, and the next instant you find yourself doomed to exist as an office boy in the Mail Room of Life, while another ex-mewling, puking babe sends down dicta, says "No comment" to the Press, and lives a real genuine Life on the screen of the world.

Countless sufferers at this hour are spending billions of dollars and endless man hours lying on analysts' couches, trying to pinpoint the exact moment that they stepped off the track and into the bushes forever.

It all hinges on one sinister reality that is rarely mentioned, no doubt due to its implacable, irreversible inevitability. These decisions cannot be changed, no matter how many brightly cheerful, buoyantly optimistic books on HOW TO ACHIEVE A RICHER, FULLER, MORE BOUNTIFUL LIFE or SEVEN MAGIC GOLDEN KEYS TO INSTANT DYNAMIC SUCCESS or THE SECRET OF HOW TO BECOME A BILLIONAIRE we read, or how many classes are attended for instruction in handshaking, back-slapping, grinning, and making After-Dinner speeches. Joseph Stalin was not a Dale Carnegie graduate. He went all the way. It is an unpleasant truth that is swallowed, if at all, like a rancid, bitter pill. A star is a star; a numberless cipher is a numberless cipher.

Even more eerie a fact is that the Great Divide is rarely a matter of talent or personality. Or even luck. Adolf Hitler had a notoriously weak handshake. His smile was, if anything, a vapid mockery. But inevitably his star zoomed higher and higher. Cinema luminaries of the first order are rarely blessed with even the modicum of Talent, and often their physical beauty leaves much to be desired. What is the difference between Us and Them, We and They, the Big Ones and the great, teeming rabble?

There are about four times in a man's life, or a woman's, too, for that matter, when unexpectedly, from out of the darkness, the blazing carbon lamp, the cosmic searchlight of Truth shines full upon them. It is how we react to those moments that forever seals our fate. One crowd simply puts on its sunglasses, lights another cigar, and heads for the nearest plush French restaurant in the jazziest section of town, sits down and orders a drink, and ignores the whole thing. While we, the Doomed, caught in the brilliant glare of illumination, see ourselves inescapably for what we are, and from that day on sulk in the weeds, hoping no one else will spot us.

"The Endless Streetcar Ride Into the Night, and the Tinfoil Noose" appears in Jean Shepherd's *In God We Trust: All Others Pay Cash*, first published by Doubleday in 1966 and reprinted in paperback by Main Street Books in 1991.