

What She Said: The Art of Pauline Kael

Here's one for the cineastes: "What She Said: The Art of Pauline Kael" traces the life and times and taste of one of our most influential movie critics. It is an insightful portrait of a writer and commentator who was much admired--and resented--for what she wrote about motion pictures during one of its banner eras.

After a career as a writer/reviewer, film programmer, and all-around gadfly, Kael (1919-2001) attained the job of film critic for The New Yorker in 1968, the stellar spot in the business. Moreover, she did it as a sharp-tongued woman in a field dominated by orthodox men. With a crackling and contentious prose style, unwavering self-confidence, and a deep love of the medium, Kael proved to be a clever, charismatic, and provocative voice, turning the tone of movie criticism on its head.

As a fan, she lauded the 1930's smart comedies. As a contemporary voice, she famously championed the New Hollywood Cinema of the late 1960s and '70s from directors like Arthur Penn ("Bonnie and Clyde"), Martin Scorsese ("Taxi Driver"), and Robert Altman ("Nashville"), along with some prominent European directors like Bernardo Bertolucci ("Last Tango in Paris"). As a tweaker of the Hollywood ethos, she delighted in savaging some of the era's biggest studio hits, like "The Sound of Music" and "Dirty Harry".

"What She Said" offers a banquet of well-chosen film clips of Kael opining over the breadth of her career and including some new archival material. Actress Sarah Jessica Parker reads from Kael's distinctive and cheeky reviews. A parade of filmmakers (Paul Schrader, Quentin Tarantino, David O. Russell, Quentin Tarantino, et al.) and critics (Molly Haskell, Camille Paglia, and David Edelstein) speak to her continuing contributions and influence.

(Not rated, this film runs 98 mins.)