

## How to Write A Review

BY Garry Victor Hill



### The Framework:

A review gives a reader information. The information should start with the title, (which is in italics) then have the name of the creator. Identify what you are reviewing; a book, film television show, concert, play, sporting event, newspaper story, magazine or whatever. After this comes the extra information such as the publisher, production studio or website identifying number. The date of creation comes next. This is important as this determines if the reviewed thing is still in print or on sale in shops. If the date given is old readers will know to shop online or to try second hand shops or libraries. Include cost if known. After the date give any other technical information that helps the reader. An illustration from the reviewed thing is best as it helps the reader with identification and makes the review look more vivid. End the framework information with your name. On the next pages are three examples of how your framework information should look.



*The Water Diviner*. Produced by Troy Lum, Andrew Mason and Keith Rodger. Directed by Russell Crowe. Screenplay by Andrew Anastasios and Andrew Knight. Based on the book by Sarah McGuire. Photography by Andrew Lesnie. Music by David Hirshfelder.

Length: 111 minutes. A Hopscotch Feature. Warner Brothers/Universal distribution. Cinematic Release December 2014. Rated R for violence

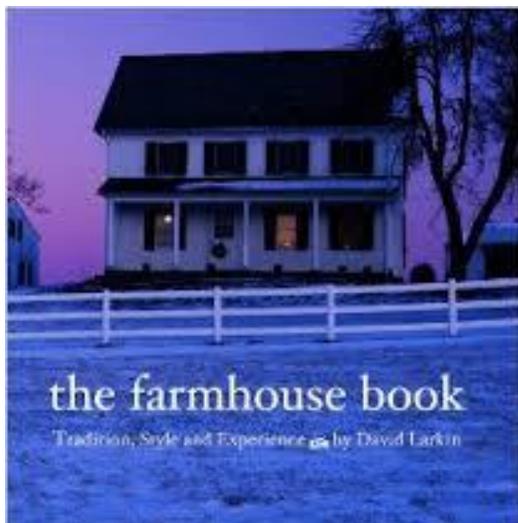
Rating \*\*\*\*\* 90% Available on DVD. \$28:50

## CAST

*Joshua Connor*: Russell Crowe *Ayshe*: Olga Kurylenko *Major Hasan*: Yilmaz Erdoğan *Sergeant Jemal*: Cem Yilmaz *Orhan*: Dylan Georgiades *Lieutenant Colonel Cyril Hughes*: Jai Courtney *Eliza Connor*: Jaqueline McKenzie *Arthur Connor*: Ryan Corr *Henry Connor*: Ben O'Toole *Edward Connor*: James Fraser *Fatma*: Megan Gale *Captain James Brindley*: Daniel Wylie *Father Macintyre*: Damon Herriman *Omer*: Steve Bastoni

*The Farmhouse Book by David Larkin*

*A Review by Garry Victor Hill*

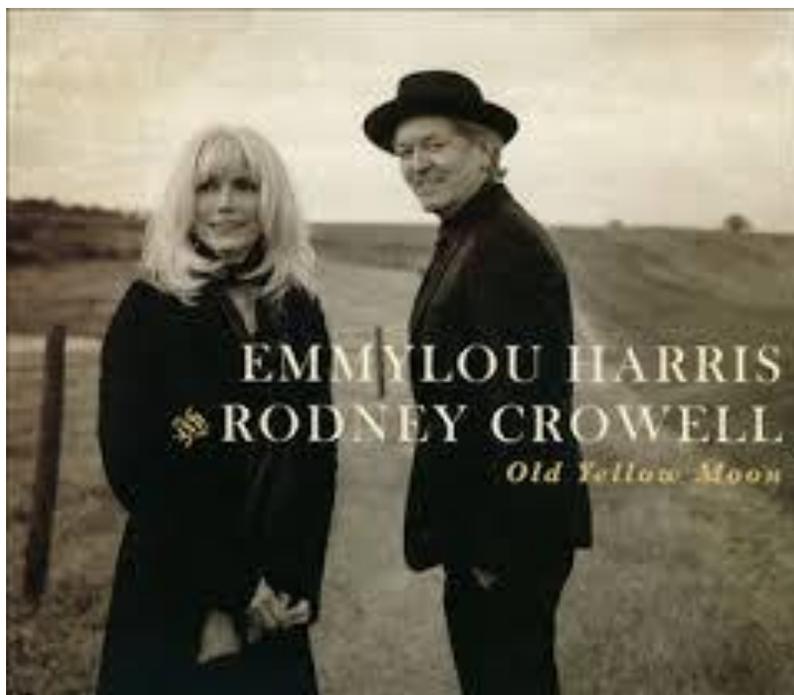


*The Farmhouse Book: Tradition, Style and Experience.*

*An Illustrated Documentary by David Larkin*

*Photography by Carl Socolow, Michael Freeman, Paul Rocheleau, and Jessie Walker*

*New York: Universe Publishing, 2005. Illustrated. 224 pages \$35 (U.S.)*



### *Old Yellow Moon* Emmylou Harris & Rodney Crowell

Produced by Brian Ahern for the Warner Music Company. 2013. CD. 41 minutes  
12 songs. Rating: \*\*\*\*\* 90% The cd comes with a twelve page booklet that  
contains the complete lyrics, photographs and production information.

#### **Introduce what the review is about.**

This should be brief and the first aim must be to give readers some basic information about what is being reviewed. i.e. “The McClymonts are three sisters from Grafton who made an astounding debut a few years back.” The next section should be a brief update for those who may know the basic information. i.e. “Now they have issued their third album” In two short sentences you have introduced the creators of what is being reviewed and the topic of your review. This is your introduction, which in a review should not be long.

#### **Say what You think**

Your next sentences can either summarise what you think or start saying a bit about what the reviewed object is about. Do not retell the story or say everything that is in the original. Say enough and say it clearly, so that the reader will know what the review is about and what you think. Do not go on at length in your opinions. On the next page are some common mistakes made by reviewers:

Adjective overload: i.e. (the words in italics) This is the most *boring, stupid, silly, cheap, worthless, crappy, ridiculous, time-wasting, trashy, badly-done* thing ever made.

Overstatement: (the words in italics) This is the most boring, stupid, silly, cheap, worthless, crappy, ridiculous, time-wasting, trashy, badly-done thing *ever made by a major recording studio since history began*

Overpraise: *Michael Jackson was one of the world's greatest geniuses as his last album demonstrates to anybody who knows anything about his brilliant work.*

Favours for Friends: Do not write reviews for friends. You could lose your friends and your reputation for honesty. In a review you must criticise and if you give false or overdone praise readers will not trust your opinions.

Ripping into rivals: Do not write reviews for people you know and dislike. This also stands out and causes distrust and feuds that devour time and get nowhere.

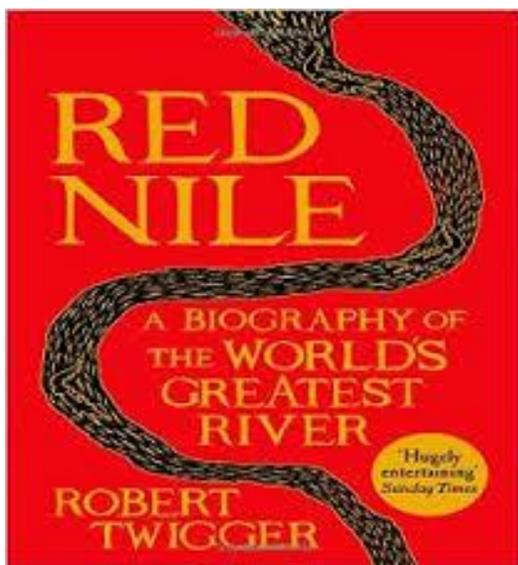
### Summary:

After saying what you think conclude the review with a one or two sentence comment that sums up what you feel.



\*

An example of a book review is on the next page and a film review follows.



*Red Nile: A Biography of the World's Greatest River.*

*By Robert Twigger*

*London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 2013. Illustrated. 466 pages*

*Reviewed by Garry Victor Hill*

A biography of a river seems an underused idea, but it also seems to be one full of dangerous choices. Emphasis and interest can easily go astray. One obvious and boring way to do this would be to put in book form something very similar to those television documentaries where the voice of the narrator emerges as the only human aspect. The voice explains landscapes, flora, fauna, climate, the effect of seasons - in fact everything to do with science and geography, but nothing about the river dwelling people. The other extreme would be to have the river gradually develop into a backdrop setting for events involving 'Famous People Who Have Visited the Nile.' This would be biography indeed, but celebrity biography in disguise.

Fortunately Robert Twigger avoids both these extremes and keeps both a sense of balance and of proportion. Chronologically and geographically the river's life began around twelve thousand years ago. Twigger continues the story up to the

2011 Arab spring revolution, which he witnessed, vividly describes and astutely analyses. That continuity makes for a panorama where he entwines the human developments along the Nile's banks with the changing geography of the river, starting from its sources in central Africa to the Mediterranean delta.



*Many maps of the Nile stop at Egypt's borders and few delineate the Blue Nile or show the Nile flowing out from different lakes in central East Africa. In Red Nile Robert Twigger does deal with the question of where the Nile actually starts.*

He tells of the continuous interrelationship between river and people, from the first tribal settlers to the latest attempts to use the Nile for irrigation and damming. Several parts of the book are taken up with such attempts from the times of the Pharaohs onwards: their effects were usually disappointing and sometimes disastrous. The Aswan dam disaster remains only the most publicised amongst these frequent failures.

Twigger writes of developments in this entwining process of people and population in ways that are welcomingly unexpected. For example the word

papyrus conjures up an image of the plant almost choking the Nile delta: the reality was that the Nile papyrus was extinct in the 1950s and had to be reintroduced. Another section deals with Egypt's poisonous plants. We are told what they are, and of their effects – and how they were used in politics to kill off rivals, from ancient times onwards.

Twigger's sense of proportion and balance also applies to what initially seems an obviously easy question: where does the Nile actually start? He concludes that the White Nile starts with the flow out from Lake Edward, but notes that there are other small streams flowing into and out of that lake and other nearby feeders interact with lakes, streams and rivers. There is no clear starting point among the rainforest marshes.

His sense of proportion and balance also applies to time and to eras. The Ancient Egyptians are dealt with, but they do not predominate. Life has indeed gone on since Cleopatra died. In his *An Egyptian Journal* (1985) English novelist William Golding made the point that Westerners see Egypt in terms of the empire of the Pharaohs when they should be seeing it as being a modern Arab country. Twigger does not make that mistake. Egypt has been a predominantly Moslem country for nearly fourteen hundred years and he not only writes of his extensive personal observations based in many years of living along the Nile, but he writes with insight into both ethnic Arab history and the effects of Islamic rule. He includes the well-known outsiders who became rulers of Egypt and lived lives out of adventure novels: notably Saladin and Baiburs. The latter started out as a bodyguard and ended up ruling an empire.. Egypt had a way of being ruled by foreigners. Saladin was a Kurd from what is now Iraq, Barburs was a Kazakh from the Crimea and after them Egypt was ruled by the Marmalukes for the Turkish Ottomans, then the French and finally the British.

Twiggers also finds the less famous who should be famed. Less well known than Saladin and Barburs but from the time of Medieval Arab rule are two of the founders of modern medicine, the expatriate Spanish Jew Maimonides and Al-Nafis. In one of his important but little known achievements (at least in the West) Al-Nafis accurately and in detail wrote of how blood circulates four hundred years before William Harvey did. Harvey got the credit, at least in the Western world. Maimonides would work for Saladin in several fields. Today his reputation rests on his writings as an innovative doctor and a man of medicine, as a theologian and a philosopher.

Another danger within Twigger's topic concerns writing about the famous and much written about English on the Nile. Doctor Livingstone, Richard Burton and Speke, General Gordon, Lord Wolseley, Lord Kitchener,... They have already got massive literary coverage in such works as Winston Churchill's *The River War* (1899), Alan Moorehead's *The White Nile* (1960) and *The Blue Nile* (1962) and Michael Asher's *Khartoum: The Ultimate Imperial Adventure* (2005). Several large sections in other works also cover these people and the events that they were involved in. Such works include Fawn M. Brodie's *The Devil Drives: A Life of Sir Richard Burton* (1967), Brian Gardener's *Allenby* (1965), Phillip Warner's *Kitchener: the Man Behind the Legend* (1985) and Thomas Parkenham's *The Scramble For Africa 1876-1912*. (1991). Howard Carter has probably had more works and documentaries about his life than any of the others just mentioned. Two underused aspects of the Westerners on the Nile concern touring writers Flaubert and Agatha Christie, both get interesting and sometimes witty segments.



*“Egypt is a nation five kilometres wide and two thousand kilometres long.” In some parts it is not even that. Here a few metres from the Nile the desert starts.*

Twigger does include these people and the events on the Nile that made them important there, but does not allow his treatment of them to become a prolonged retelling. He says little of the political turmoil that started in the 1920s and continued into the 1950s. This conflict was between the various individuals representing imperialists, nationalists and royalists who vied to control the Nile and therefore Egypt. This convoluted, complicated and prolonged struggle probably deserves another book as large as this one. As part of this development Twigger includes a section on Sadat's active youthful support for Hitler, an aspect

of his career that deserves detail. A section on the architecturally magnificent Shepherd's Hotel, the most luxurious in the Middle East would have been good. It was located on the Nile in Cairo and served as the heart of British Imperialism in the Middle East. An Egyptian mob burnt it down during the independence Revolution of 1952.

The last sections of his book are pensive as he writes of the ecological, demographic, financial and social pressures that Mubarak could not contain and so they lead to Egypt's Arab spring. Twigger does not give easy answers and there seems to be none. The Nile however, despite ecological poison, despite damming and population pressures will continue to flow – but through what?

\*

## *The Water Diviner* Reviewed by Garry Hill



*The Water Diviner*. Produced by Troy Lum, Andrew Mason and Keith Rodger. Directed by Russell Crowe. Screenplay by Andrew Anastasios and Andrew Knight. Based on the book by Sarah McGuire. Photography by Andrew Lesnie. Music by David Hirshfelder.

Length: 111 minutes. A Hopscotch Feature. Warner Brothers/Universal distribution. Cinematic Release December 2014. Rated R for violence

Rating \*\*\*\*\* 90% Available on DVD.

### CAST

*Joshua Connor*: Russell Crowe *Ayshe*: Olga Kurylenko *Major Hasan*: Yilmaz Erdoğan *Sergeant Jemal*: Cem Yilmaz *Orhan*: Dylan Georgiades *Lieutenant Colonel Cyril Hughes*: Jai Courtney *Eliza Connor*: Jaqueline McKenzie *Arthur Connor*: Ryan Corr *Henry Connor*: Ben O'Toole *Edward Connor*: James Fraser *Fatma*: Megan Gale *Captain James Brindley*: Daniel Wylie *Father Macintyre*: Damon Herriman *Omer*: Steve Bastoni

From the first scenes this emerges as a welcomingly different film. Lines of tired, pensive Turkish soldiers, clothed in motley, ragged uniforms, prepare to charge the enemy trenches. The stereotypical images of Middle Eastern soldiers, all glinting eyes as they cheerfully leap forward to kill, does not exist here: they are just weary and fearful men defending their homeland. When they do charge the trenches they are at first puzzled as the trenches are empty: then to their initial credulity they see the Allied ships sailing off. As they run up the rise the images of dirty, muddy trenches give way to a bright blue sea under a cloudless sky. Laughter and cheers replace their sadness. After living in a state of extraordinary tension and miserable expectations of death and more suffering, they find that life can also give exuberant joy. That idea emerges again in the film's conclusion.

After those scenes the next, set four years later, is as far away from Gallipoli as anyone can get – the Mallee country of Northwest Victoria. Here the process reverses. Joshua Connor, a farmer and water diviner, goes into a jubilant state when he finds water on his land, but returns home to being depressed as his wife can only be happy when she sinks into a fantasy that their three sons are still alive. All three were killed in one day at Gallipoli. There cannot be any peace on the Connor's farm. After his wife drowns herself, he determines to keep his promise to her and see that they get a proper burial, so he journeys to Gallipoli.

He finds that an absence of war is far from being the same thing as peace, for as a supercilious and cynical British officer explains to him, the defeated Ottoman Empire is being carved up by the victors, England, France and Greece. He also explains to Connor that resentful Turks are causing problems. For some reason they do not like that process or the occupying English army in Istanbul. Connor soon shares that dislike as the officious English try to stop him visiting Gallipoli where their War Graves Commission work to identify and rebury the dead. That is part of bringing order to war's chaos. Both Turkish and British soldiers now work together to tidy up the battlefield they once ferociously fought over. Initially seen as a pest by the soldiers there, both Allied and Turkish come to respect Connor and help him with his task.

He soon finds himself embroiled in four different problems at once; his personal battle with English officialdom worsens, as does the worsening political situation. Then the attraction between himself and his hotel owner Ayshe, under familial and religious compulsion to marry someone else, leads him and her into

tensions with her relatives. Finally he finds that just burying his sons is not enough: he must resolve the mystery of what did happen to them.

*The Water Diviner* is a well crafted film with locales and sets that make for an intelligent use of epic and a fine sense of era. Andrew Lesnie's photography is extraordinarily effective, often beautiful, at times even sensual, giving a strong sense of sun drenched lands. Like many other very experienced stars making their directorial debut, Crowe has a strong sense of narrative and knows how to use his cast. He also knows how to avoid stereotypes. The British officers are not hearty stupid types, but cranky tired men wanting to be home. The Turks are not ferocious warriors, but generous, courteous and courageous. Aysha is no subservient widow, but fights for her rights.



*This photographic still gives an accurate idea of the high quality of the film's photography*

The story is well told and Crowe wisely goes for an underused era and locale. The only other major English language films to cover the same territory that comes to mind are Peter Weir's *Gallipoli* (1981) and the 1970 Tony Curtis-Charles Bronson adventure *You Can't Win em All*. That film was set in 1922 towards the end of the Greek-Turkish war. Only in the last quarter when Connor goes eastwards by train into the war zone does Crowe's movie begin to resemble

the earlier action movie as the war between Greece and Turkey finally breaks out. A similar idea to that which is the focus of *The Water Diviner* was used in the 1982 Costa-Gavras film *Missing*. Ed Horman, an American, arrives in Chile searching for his missing son, but Chile is turbulent after the 1973 coup, and like Connor he soon finds that a repressive military government combines with the officials he expects help from to thwart his attempts. Both Connor and Horman are courteous, patient and restrained and possess a fundamental decency. With both men these characteristics conceal a quiet but relentless determination to find their sons.

*The Water Diviner* differs from both *Gallipoli* and *Missing* however in its view of humanity. Peter Weir's film shows good men being devoured by war and as being helpless to stop that process. In Costa-Gavras's film we are shown how low humans can go with the establishment of a fascist dictatorship which only a few decent people unsuccessfully battle. In *The Water Diviner* Connor wins against the effects of war.

\*



◆ ◆ THE ◆ ◆  
**WATER DIVINER**

A FATHER'S JOURNEY IN SEARCH OF HIS SONS

A FILM BY  
ACADEMY AWARD® WINNER  
**RUSSELL CROWE**

Check the Classification

IN CINEMAS DECEMBER 26  
#THEWATERDIVINERMUSIC #THEWATERDIVINER

