

Episode #2 Show Notes: Golden Age Hollywood: *Marty*

Don't you love it when you discover a film—quite by surprise—that really moves you? A good movie is one that lingers long after the closing credits roll. The next day, as you go about your routine tasks, it creeps into your consciousness and you find yourself replaying a scene in your mind or examining the psyches of the characters. For several sweet minutes you are not at your desk or in your car, but somewhere far away within the universe created by a screenwriter, director, and troupe of actors. The film does what it was intended to do: serve as an escape hatch from our reality.

Sometimes the simplest stories are the best, because their uncluttered plots allow you to plunge into the emotional depths of the characters. Simple stories can be difficult to find today. Many of the films in our current era are constructed to inspire thrills or score political or social points. How nice it is to encounter a quiet film like 1955's *Marty* that showcases for us the arc of pathos and triumph that is, essentially, everyone's life.

Marty (1955) – Academy Award, Best Motion Picture

Delbert Mann – Academy Award, Best Director

Paddy Chayefsky – Academy Award, Best Screenplay

Ernest Borgnine – Academy Award, Best Actor

- [Listen to Ernest Borgnine's acceptance speech.](#)
- [Listen to Ernest Borgnine talking about winning the Oscar for *Marty*](#)

Betsy Blair – Nominated, Academy Award, Best Supporting Actress

A Summary of Marty

At 34, Marty Piletti (Ernest Borgnine) is the last of his family to get married. Constantly badgered by his family to find a girl and settle down, Marty has resigned himself to bachelorhood after years of rejection by women. Good-natured, but socially awkward, Marty considers himself unattractive and someone women just don't find desirable. At a dance one Saturday night he meets Clara (Betsy Blair), after he sees that she's been abandoned by her date for another girl. Clara, a homely school teacher on the verge of spinsterhood, is a kind, sensitive girl, and the two hit it off. They spend the evening together, and Marty even takes her to his house, where Clara meets his mother. At the end of the evening, Marty says he'll call Clara the next day. He takes her home, and he walks back to his house, full of joy and anticipation for the future.

His friends, however, later criticize Clara because she's unattractive. His mother, fearful that Marty will marry Clara and leave her all alone, starts to criticize her as well. As a result, Marty doesn't call Clara after all. That night, settled once again into his lonely routine, Marty realizes that he is giving up a woman who makes him happy. Despite the objections of his friends, he runs to a phone booth to call Clara. The film ends there, implying that the two come together and live happily ever after.

Quotes from the film:

- At the dance, after Clara has been abandoned by her date and Marty finds her crying he tells her: "I cry all the time—any little thing. All my brothers and my brothers-in-law, they're always telling me what a good-natured guy I am. You don't get to be good-natured by accident. You get kicked around long enough and you get to be a real professor of pain."
- At the dance, when Marty and Clara are dancing, and an attraction between them first begins to take root, he says: "You know how I figure, two people get married and they're going to live together 40 or 50 years, so it's got to be more than just whether they're good-looking for not. Now, you tell me you think you're not so good-looking. Well, my father was a real ugly man, but my mother adored him. She told me how she used to get so miserable sometimes, like everybody, you know? And she said my father always tried to understand. I used to see them sometimes when I was a kid sitting in the living room talking and talking, and I used to adore my old man because he was always so kind. That's one of the most beautiful things I have in my life—and my father was a real ugly man."
- At the end of the film, when Marty decides to call Clara despite the objections of his friends, he tells them: "You don't like her, my mother don't like her, she's a dog and I'm a fat, ugly man! Well, all I know is I had a good time last night! I'm gonna have a good time tonight! If we have enough good times together, I'm gonna get down on my knees and I'm gonna beg that girl to marry me! If we make a party on New Year's, I got a date for that party. You don't like her? That's too bad!"

[A \(Very\) Brief History of the Academy Awards](#)

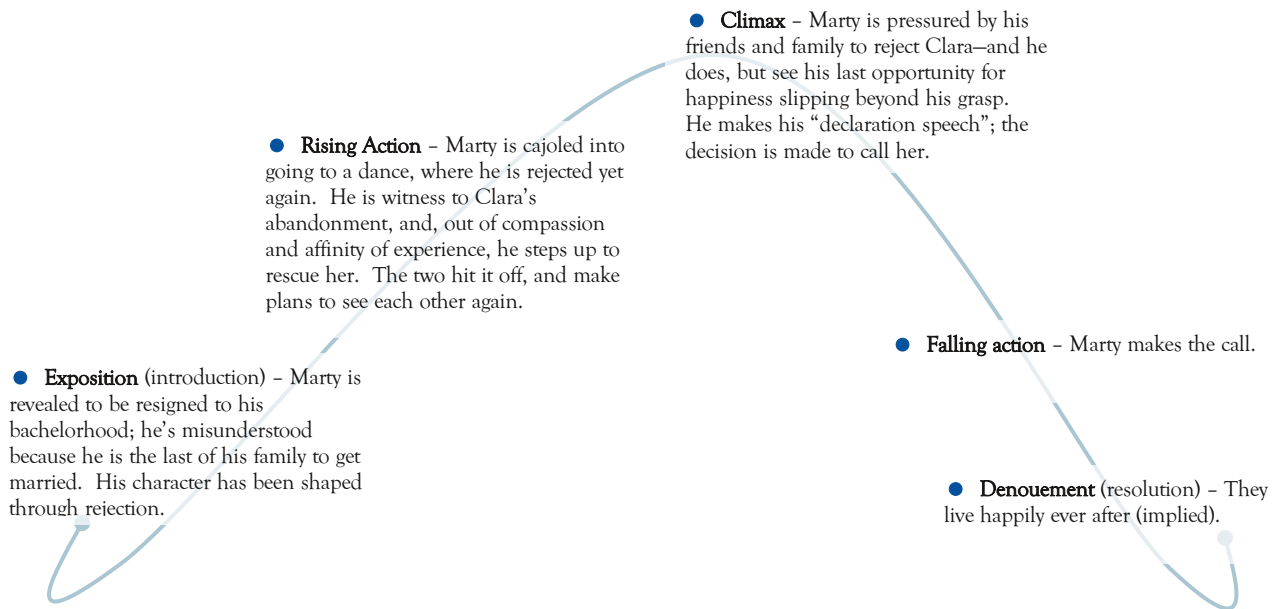
The Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences was the conception of Louis B. Mayer, founder of the Louis B. Mayer Pictures Corporation, which would ultimately become part of Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer (MGM). He created the award to unite the various players in the film industry, including actors, directors, producers, technicians, and writers. According to Wikipedia, he said: "I found that the best way to handle [filmmakers] was to hang medals all over them...If I got them cups and awards, they'd kill themselves to produce what I wanted. That's why the Academy Award was created."

- The first ceremony was held on May 16, 1929 at the Hollywood Roosevelt Hotel in Los Angeles.

- From Wikipedia: “It consisted of a private dinner with 36 banquet tables where 270 people attended and tickets cost \$5.00. Actors and actresses arrived at the hotel in luxury vehicles, to see and be seen by their fans, much like today. The ceremony was not broadcast on radio or television. The ceremony itself was 15 minutes in length.”
- At the first Academy Awards, artists could be, and were, nominated for work in a single film, for work across multiple films, or for work without reference to any specific film.
- The first film to win an Academy Award was *Wings*.

The Five Parts of a Story

Stories follow a five-part arc that includes the exposition (or introduction), rising action, climax, falling action, and denouement (or resolution). *Marty* can be placed within this framework as follows:



How to Watch a Film: A Viewer's Guide

There are a lot of ways to watch a film. Sometimes the best way is to just sit back and let yourself be carried away. But sometimes, when you sense a greater depth in the story than what's made obvious on the surface, it's nice to drill down and examine how the magic is made. There are different approaches to critically reviewing a film; what's presented here is one. Consider using this viewer's guide the next time you want to watch—and then discuss—a film.

Plot: What happened in the film?

- Did it ring true?
- Did it “hang together” in a believable way? Did it effectively suspend our disbelief?
- Was it a story worth telling?
- Was it predictable/cliché or surprising and fresh?

Theme: What did it mean?

- Was there a take-away?
- Was there a subtext?
- Were there symbols, motifs, or common threads that helped convey meaning?

Characters: Were they Believable?

- Did the characters draw your attention away from the actors who portrayed them?
- Were the characters complex and atypical (as opposed to stereotypical)
- Did the characters change or evolve in some way?

Direction: How did the Director Tell the Story?

- Was the pacing appropriate?
- Was there an appropriate level of tension within the film?
- Did all of the elements (acting, setting, plot, cinematography etc.) come together well?

Dialogue: Was the Dialogue Revealing?

- Did the dialogue ring true?
- Did the dialogue reveal things about the characters?
- Did the dialogue move the story along, or did it seem arbitrary?

Cinematography and Production Design

- Did the camera work help to tell the story?
- Did the sets create an appropriate environment and atmosphere for the story?
- Did the film help to transport the audience to the place and time of the story?

Favorite Thing of the Week

My favorite thing this week is the *Everyman's Pocket Poet Series*. This is a series of pretty little books, available through Amazon, that anthologize poetry either by theme or by poet. One of the great things about this series is that it invites non-poetry fans to take their first tentative steps into the genre. Poems range from classical to contemporary. One of the titles in the series (and there are *many* titles in this series) is relevant to our topic in this episode: *Reel Verse: Poems about the Movies*.