Chanelle Cadot

Assignment 2

Dear Booker,

It comes to my attention that it has been a while since I last conversed with you, but I recently watched a movie that I was interested in hearing your opinion of because I know you also think popular culture should challenge traditional values, and this movie did just that. The movie is called *Legally Blonde*, and I came into the movie thinking it would be one of those mindless, entertaining works of pop culture. You know what they say: Ninety percent of works of popular culture aren’t worth a second thought, but ten percent of it contains some worthwhile, thought-provoking material. It turns out *Legally Blonde* can be put into this ten percent category due to the fact that itis surprisingly packed with implications on sexist stereotypes especially in a realm of higher education. *Legally Blonde* brings about these important issues in a way that is subtle, so that the traditional values brought up are not attacked, but are challenged, which allows for a much more productive and effective discussion of the issues. The main character, Elle Woods, serves an embodiment of the stereotypical blonde, ditzy woman. However, Elle’s transition in the movie to a serious law student at Harvard serves to break this stereotype. She shows that women are just as capable at becoming serious and competent students. Furthermore, she serves to represent the broadening of higher education to a wider group. Higher education and college used to be predominantly occupied by privileged, white males. *Legally Blonde* uses Elle’s character to challenge this traditional idea that women belong in the household realm and don’t need a higher education or job. As a woman doing very successfully at an Ivy League college, she demonstrates that college is not just a male domain and that women also belong there. This may not seem as pertinent as a problem as say fifty years ago because colleges have been enrolled with more and more women in the past half-century, but there is still a major imbalance in some of the majors in terms of gender. Some fields of study that continue to be male dominated include engineering and law. At the beginning of the movie, Elle was a fashion student, which is kind of a stereotypical “womanly” major, and her commencement in this major serves to represent what is normally considered a major for a woman. Even with more women going to college, there still exist this stereotype of kinds of studies that are more suited for men versus women and vice versa, and that women might not be able to handle such a challenging major as something like law. However, Elle’s transition to studying law serves as a challenge to the male- dominated studies that women are just as capable as men in being successful in these fields, and her emergence in this field becomes a “subtle peer pressure” in normalizing the idea of women working and studying in these domains. I’m so glad I came across this movie because it’s such a great example of how pop culture can serve to effectively CHALLENGE traditional values versus ATTACKING them with its implications about gender values and stereotypes. I look forward to hearing back from you soon and getting to know what you thought of the movie and its important implications on sexism.

Sincerely,

Wolf

You might consider re-structuring this letter. You can begin by more clearly defining your argument regarding the film’s “implications” before going into the ways in which it challenges rather than attacks. A more logical flow will also allow you to dig a bit deeper with your analysis.

Dear Wolf,

I appreciate that you thought of me in discussing a popular culture medium that you thought would be of importance, however, I did not see the wide implications of *Legally Blonde* that you did. I agree that popular culture can be an important way in which traditional values can be challenged and that Enlightenment, progressive thinking can be incited, but I don’t think this particular work does either of these things. If anything I think *Legally Blonde* further entrenched the negative stereotypes of women because although Elle transitions to becoming a more serious student and to eventually winning a big court case, the way in which she won the court case overshadowed her actual achievement. This is because she solved the case with her knowledge of perms and hair, so although this movie shows her having this huge success, it’s not represented through superior intellectual prowess or something barrier-breaking for woman. Instead, her success is attributed to her knowledge of something that is stereotypically represented as an expertise of women; hair. The other time in the movie that Elle made a significant discovery in the courtroom was when she deduced that the man allegedly having an affair with the murder-suspect Brooke was gay. The way in which Elle figured this out, though, was in the kinds of shoes the man was wearing. Therefore, every time Elle did something of importance, it was through her knowledge of shoes and hair; topics that are supposedly the woman’s domain and expertise. Elle’s two sorority friends also serve to further entrench the stereotype of ditzy women because every appearance they made in the movie portrayed these women as extremely shallow and materialistic. For example, when they call Elle at Harvard, the big news one of them has to share with Elle is the fact that she got bangs. This instance portrays these women as having very simple and shallow thoughts that are of very little importance. Then, when these friends show up in the courtroom to support Elle, they are dressed very exuberantly and act inappropriately for the occasion making the point that these mindless girls do not belong in such a serious and academic setting. There were two kinds of stereotypical women portrayed in this movie, one being very beautiful, materialistic, shallow, and ditzy and the other being smart yet mean and prudish. Elle and her two hometown friends were represented by this first stereotype and the character Vivian embodied the second stereotype. Although Vivian may first appear to be a positive representation of a woman because she is portrayed as smart and successful, she is also shown as being mean and cattish. Therefore, *Legally Blonde* entrenches several different stereotypes of women, and all of these stereotypes are negative and thus regressive to Enlightenment thinking and challenging of traditional values. While this movie may be entertaining to watch, it is meant for just that; entertainment. It was not meant for progressive thought and the challenge of traditional values. However, I do acknowledge the multiplicity of popular culture works, and the fact that every viewer comes in with different television viewing experiences resulting in everyone taking out something different from a certain work, so I can see where you got a different understanding of the movie than I did.

Best Regards,

Booker

Writer’s Memo

I started out by reading the two different articles again and consolidating what they were arguing and the differences in their arguments. I tried to pay attention to the words that they used frequently and that were important to their arguments. Next, I looked at the sample letters that past students had done just to help inspire me and give me an idea of how they formulated their arguments. By this point, I had a good idea of how I wanted to structure my writing and what points I wanted each side to emphasize, but I still needed to decide what popular culture text I wanted Booker and Wolf to analyze. I finally decided on the movie *Legally Blonde* because I felt like I could make an argument on both sides regarding the implications of this movie on stereotypes of women. I developed the arguments of Booker and Wolf on this text by taking the main points that they made in their own articles and applying those arguments about popular culture texts in general to this specific text. I tried to keep in mind what I thought they would think about when seeing this movie, and I made sure to emphasize the differences in their arguments. I felt like the writing process was harder this time because of the awareness I had to have of trying to replicate a certain kind of rhetoric. Unlike the book review where I was just writing the way I would normally do so, I had to keep in mind that I was not writing from my perspective but from someone else’s. I think my strengths in this assignment was emphasizing the differences in the two men’s arguments regarding popular culture and its challenge of traditional values. I also think I translated their own views on popular culture in general to the specific text. The weakness I had in this assignment was trying to embody the men’s rhetorical style. I felt like I got their general ideas across pretty well, but I had trouble replicating the ways in which they write. I thought trying to alter my writing to fit someone else’s style was the most challenging part of this assignment.

Chanelle,

You’ve chosen a productive pop culture text to work with as well as come up with some really authentic-sounding arguments for both Booker and Wolf. The framework that you set up, too, nicely grounds the conversation. What you need to do from here is slow down and flesh out the analysis in each letter. Allowing your arguments to become stronger and more distinct will do a lot for making the styles seem more distinct as well. You’ll allow yourself more space to do this kind of fleshing out by creating some paragraph breaks to give your analysis room to breath as well. A greater focus on content over creative style will yield much more persuasive letters overall.