

As I occasionally do with this column I will remind people that I have no connection to the Turner organization. I write this column because I am just one of those guys--and there are lots of them around--who have seen a lot of movies and wants to nudge people over to the ones I thought were particularly worthwhile. My taste is arguably dubious, but at least it is experienced. There are lots of great films out there that nearly nobody has heard of and even more that somebody has heard of but *you* probably haven't. I just want to give people tips on what may be movie they will like and maybe will get some tips in return.

Summer is almost over and it is time to go back to my normal schedule. As I scanned the listings of Turner Classic Movies I got something of a surprise. Last April I saw one of the best documentaries about cinema that I can ever remember seeing. A word that I hesitate to use, but it is accurate, I found the film *charming*. Almost certainly it will be on my list of the top ten films of 2017. The film is HAROLD AND LILLIAN: A HOLLYWOOD LOVE STORY (2015). I expected the film would get a short playing and then disappear to some obscure page on YouTube. That is the way it is with most documentaries. Puff it is here, zap it is gone. Apparently Turner knows documentary film and knows how transitory some documentaries are. They are showing HAROLD AND LILLIAN just five months or so after its release. Now before you say you are not interested in a love story, look at the trailer. I will include a link for it below. So what is so good? Let me quote from my own review:

"This is the story of the lives of a Hollywood couple, Lillian and Harold Michelson. They were the barely-sung heroes of the Hollywood film industry for six decades. Harold had an instinct for how films should look and created pitch-perfect storyboards, often transforming the director's whole vision of the film being shot. Lillian had a huge and well-collected research library to find authentic visions from around the world, from all of history, and into the future. The story of their private lives is a love story of a nearly perfect marriage. Their visual style and knowledge shaped the look and feel of surprisingly many classic films."

Me again: The film is profusely illustrated with images that will be very familiar. Harold created images for films like THE BIRDS, WEST SIDE STORY, NORTH BY NORTHWEST and THE GRADUATE, but many, many more. He would see the scene in his mind's eye and could rapidly put what he saw on storyboard paper.

For example, in THE GRADUATE you have an iconic image of Benjamin as shot through an arch that is Mrs. Robinson's naked bent leg. The idea for that scene was just something that Harold Michelson thought up and sketched on paper.

Lillian did research for films. If you want to know what Roman armor looked like at the time of BEN HUR, she could find it in her library. If you want to know what women's underwear in the shtetl looked like so that FIDDLER ON THE ROOF would get it right--she could do the research. Want to know how drug lords live in South America? Lillian did not immediately know, so she contacted a real drug lord and was all ready to fly down to South America and back so he could show her his home, when Harold convinced her it was a bad idea. [Wednesday, September 13, 8:00 PM]

[Trailer at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sfc3aAQ_UTI]

Best film of the month: I just recently saw AMERICA AMERICA written, produced, and directed by Elia Kazan. The story is mostly true and about Kazan's uncle who make an epic journey from Turkey to America, which he saw as a land of miracles. [Thursday, September 7, 12:30 PM]

[-mrl]

The Universal Monster Universe (letter of comment by Kevin R):

In response to [Mark's comments on the 1930s and 1940s Universal monster universe](#) in the 08/18/17 issue of the MT VOID, Kevin R writes:

DELL COMICS, after it split with Western Publishing, which continued publishing what Dell had as "Gold Key," tried the "monsters as super-hero" idea in the 1960s.

It did not go well.

[/understatement]

See:

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dracula_\(Dell_Comics\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dracula_(Dell_Comics))
<http://www.toonopedia.com/dracdell.htm>

They did FRANKENSTEIN (not to be confused with Dick Briefer's wonderful work for PRIZE COMICS) and WEREWOLF.

Horrible, in the wrong way. Film studios, do not repeat this! [-kr]

Mark says:

I thought I heard that Dracula was originally part of the inspiration for Batman. [-mrl]

AN INCONVENIENT SEQUEL (letters of comment by Kevin R and Keith F. Lynch):

In response to [Art Stadlin's review of AN INCONVENIENT SEQUEL](#) in the 08/18/17 issue of the MT VOID, Kevin R writes:

The idea that the need to save the environment justifies statism is the irritant among free marketers, though I know of social conservatives of the James Watt variety who have the "use the Earth up, we won't need it when Jesus comes back" mindset.

Gauchely quoting himself.....

Ever read "After Communism" by Robert Heilbroner? [The New Yorker, September 10, 1990 P. 91]: "Socialism may not continue as an important force now that Communism is finished. But another way of looking at socialism is as the society that must emerge if humanity is to cope with the ecological burden that economic growth is placing on the environment."

[<http://www.newyorker.com/magazine/1990/09/10/after-communism>]

IOW, using environmentalism to sneak a planned economy back in after it failed so massively. The watermelon strategy. Green on the outside...

Heilbroner was no right wing nut.

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Robert_Heilbroner: "Published in 1953, THE WORLDLY PHILOSOPHERS has sold nearly four million copies, making it the second-best-selling economics text of all time (the first being Paul Samuelson's ECONOMICS, a highly popular university textbook). The seventh edition of the book, published in 1999, included a new final chapter entitled "The End of Worldly Philosophy?", which included both a grim view on the current state of economics as well as a hopeful vision for a "reborn worldly philosophy" that incorporated social aspects of capitalism.

He also came up with a way of classifying economies, as either Traditional (primarily agriculturally based, perhaps subsistence economy), Command (centrally planned economy, often involving the state), Market (capitalism), or Mixed. Though an outspoken socialist for nearly his entire career, Heilbroner famously wrote in a 1989 New Yorker article prior to the collapse of the Soviet Union. Less than 75 years after it officially began, the contest between capitalism and socialism is over: capitalism has won...Capitalism organizes the material affairs of humankind more satisfactorily than socialism."

He was someone who could see that the side he used to carry the banner for had lost. He also knew what bolt hole the communists and fellow travelers would make for: a coat of green over the red.

Now, this isn't to say they aren't authentic enviros, honestly concerned about the future of the planet. But there are power-lusting statists among them, so I reserve the right to be suspicious of them.

Note: I accept that average temps are up, and I accept that human activity probably is contributing to it. That doesn't change the fact that, as the USSR was collapsing, statists of "the left"--for whatever value of "left" we are talking about--reached for ecology as a life ring to keep their control-freak fetishes afloat. Hence, the suspicion.

[/rant]

[-kr]

Keith Lynch responds:

Ironic [environmental statism], since the USSR wasn't exactly known for their environmental stewardship. They were perhaps the least green nation that ever existed.

Much of the skepticism about climate change is probably due to how statists seem downright gleeful, as if it was the best news they'd heard in years. "At last, an excuse to...."

I'm skeptical of economic growth. We keep hearing about how the US is becoming at least 2% wealthier every year. I just don't find that plausible. Except for things relating to electronics and communications, almost every category of goods and services is less affordable to the typical American than it was half a century ago.

I think it's an illusion, partly due to inflation rates being underestimated, and partly due to GDP being a junk number. GDP

counts not just positive goods or work, but also telemarketing, spamming, casinos, cigarettes, prosecutors convicting the innocent, defense attorneys acquitting the guilty, insurance policies that people buy only because they're required to, etc.

Or maybe the growth is only happening in other countries. It would hardly be fair of the US, EU, etc., to say that the environment can only afford a few advanced countries, and the rest of the world will have to remain primitive. No more draining swamps. No more building nuclear reactors. Crocodiles have to eat someone or they'll starve, and Americans certainly aren't about to volunteer to be eaten. [-kfl]

THE MARTIAN (letters of comment by Kevin R and Keith F. Lynch):

In response to [Evelyn's comments on THE MARTIAN](#) in the 08/18/17 issue of the MT VOID, Kevin R writes:

["How does Watney even know what a phone booth is by the time THE MARTIAN takes place?"]

I'm old enough to remember phone booths, but when I was a kid I saw movies with crank-style phones, and the ones with the earpiece on a cable and the mike on the main part of the device. Maybe Watney saw some old media with phone booths, or it just survived as an idiom, like "the whole 9 yards?" [-kr]

Keith Lynch notes:

According to "The Martian Wikia," Watney was born in 1994. He's already in his 20s [in our time]. He grew up with phone booths. [-kfl]

Kevin R responds:

Full-height, enclosed phone booths are rare out here in the 'burbs. The Big Apple still has some;

<http://www.payphone-project.com/2017/nyc-phone-booth-roundup.html>

Still ... SUPERMAN (1978). This clip. Skip to 2:24

The "payphone kiosk" had made such inroads against the phone that it made this joke possible. [-kr]

Time Reversal Stories (letters of comment by Keith F. Lynch and R. Looney):

In response to [Evelyn's comments on time reversal stories](#) in the 08/11/17 issue of the MT VOID, Keith Lynch writes:

I seem to have read more such stories than you have. Unfortunately I don't remember the titles or authors of most of them. I remember one in ANALOG in which a space station is discovered that is in two halves held apart by magnets. Half is matter. The other half is antimatter and contains a time-reversed alien. People enter the matter half and communicate with the alien. Of course the more people teach it, the less it knows.

A story I read in an anthology within the past few years recounted what seemed to be an average American's life, only completely in reverse, and nobody saw anything odd about that. He came into existence at the scene of a serious car crash, and the first thing he saw was the headlights of a car rapidly receding. The story includes his mother being dug up in a graveyard and coming to life in a hospital.

A recent (to me) instance is Greg Egan's "Orthogonal" trilogy. In one subplot, some "people" land on an uninhabited time-reversed planet. Shortly before landing, they notice that their spaceship is very dusty inside, but they're unable to clean it. However, after they land, the dust all gets tracked outdoors and the spaceship is clean inside when they leave. When they land, they're surrounded by footprints, which disappear as they walk in them. When they go to plant some plants, they find the holes already dug for them. The plants won't grow. They decide they need time-forward soil, so they make some by using some time-forward explosives on some rock. This works. And the fresh rock face created by the explosives has some ancient carvings, which are in their honor, (un)carved by their remote descendants.

Earlier Egan wrote "The Hundred Light-Year Diary" about the near-future discovery of time-reversed galaxies. Just charge a CCD, aim it at a blank part of the sky, and see if it discharges. (I wonder if anyone has ever tried that.) By reflecting their light back and forth and modulating it with a signal, it's possible to send messages back through time.

I was much more impressed with CRYPTOZOIC! than you were, perhaps because it was my first exposure to the idea. The idea was that we're objectively wrong about the direction of time because we were hypnotized into thinking it went in what we regarded as the normal direction. People from the near future are visiting to undo this hypnosis--after which we realize that no, they are from the near past, and they're doing, not undoing, the hypnosis. The reason for it is to save us from the

despair at the pending collapse of science and technology, shrinkage of the population, devolution into dumb animals, and finally the implosion of the universe. Yes, it's also a time travel novel. The big reveal is that the Cryptozoic (Precambrian) isn't in the distant past, but the distant future.

The "Swedish bookstore" scene in the movie TOP SECRET was filmed in reverse. You can see the scene at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iDNjDnKxAfA>. [-kfl]

And R. Looney writes:

I enjoyed your recent survey of reverse-time books in the most recent MT VOID but thought you missed one, shouldn't Roger Zelazny's "Divine Madness" deserve an honorable mention? But it's just a short story, not a whole novel. [-rl]

Evelyn replies:

Thanks for the additional stories and comments. When I initially looked up "time reversal stories," I found only the ones I mentioned. But now when I look in (say) John Clute's THE ENCYCLOPEDIA OF SCIENCE FICTION, I find a lot more, so I have no idea how I missed them originally. [-ecl]

The Shape of Places to Come (letters of comment by Keith F. Lynch and Peter Trei):

In response to [Mark's comments on the changing shapes of states](#) in the 08/04/17 issue of the MT VOID, Keith Lynch writes:

[Mark writes,] "My nice comfy feeling that I knew the shape of all the states is gone. I will no longer recognize the shape of Louisiana. That worries me more than that Pluto is no longer a planet for me."

Pluto is still there, and is unchanged. Its name and its category are the least interesting things about it.

[The Louisiana change should worry you], as it's an actual change, unlike anything that happened to Pluto. But is it real? That article says the change happened between 1932 and 2000. But I just checked Google Earth, and it shows me photos allegedly taken from 2015 to 2017 which show the Pelican State with the familiar old shape. Can you find any photos online that show the new shape?

The only changes I've noticed in Google Earth from my childhood globe are in the opposite direction: Lake Chad and the Aral Sea have almost entirely disappeared. [-kfl]

Peter Trei adds:

If Keith were to check out the Dead, Caspian, and Salton Seas sometime, he might add those to the list.

The Great Salt Lake also changes a lot. [-pt]

Evelyn notes:

There is much more, often off-topic, at <https://tinyurl.com/void-rasff-louisiana>. The gist seems to be that there is a lot of area in Louisiana that may look like land from the area, but is actually at best swamp. [-ecl]

This Week's Reading (book comments by Evelyn C. Leeper):

SAPIENS: A BRIEF HISTORY OF HUMANKIND by Yuval Noah Harari (ISBN 978-0-099-59008-8) covers Homo sapiens through four "revolutions": the Cognitive Revolution, the Agricultural Revolution, the Unification of Humankind, and the Scientific Revolution. The third ("the Unification of Humankind") is often overlooked or rather, not often considered as a major change in Homo sapiens. Harari also looks forward to a possible fifth revolution, which would be the end of Homo sapiens as it changes into a new species.

Harari is careful to distinguish between our specific species, "Homo sapiens" (which he refers to as "sapiens"), and all members of the genus Homo," (which he refers to as humans"). He does this to encompass not only the past (extinct) species of the genus Homo, but possible future species as well.

I found Harari's account of how we got to where we are engaging. However, I was not convinced by his explanation of religion, and I am sure that many will disagree with his account of economics in the sections on the unification of mankind, continuing into the scientific revolution. There is a lot to think about--and to argue about--in his analysis of how one should measure happiness, particularly in people long dead.

Harari is on shaky ground as well when he offers opinions on subjects he has not sufficiently researched. Harari writes about the quest for immortality (or at least "a-mortality"), and then says, "This is not science-fiction. Most science-fiction plots describe a world in which Sapiens--identical to us--enjoy superior technology such as light-speed spaceships and laser guns. The ethical and political dilemmas central to these plots are taken from our own world, and they merely recreate our emotional and social tensions against a futuristic background." One gets the distinct impression that Harari is getting his impressions from films, rather than from a knowledge of written science fiction. (That he uses Shelley, Huxley, and Orwell to illustrate some of his points proves that science fiction is not all light-speed ships and laser guns.)

As far as the future, Harari sees energy and resources as basically limitless, though he recognizes that all energy(*) comes from the sun and is limited to 3,766,800 exajoules a year. (Harari does acknowledge nuclear and gravitational energy but does not quantify them.) He says that we now use 50 exajoules a year, so we are a long way away from ever reaching the limits of the sun's energy. But he does not note that our energy use has been doubling every twenty years, nor that at this rate, in only 300 years or so, we will be using it all. (Yes, I realize this may be comparable to Mark Twain's extrapolations about the length of the Mississippi River.)

In SAPIENS, there is a lot that is informative, a lot that is thought-provoking, a lot that is arguable, and some that is just wrong. Each reader must figure out for themselves what is which. [-ecl]

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Quote of the Week:

A black cat crossing your path signifies that the animal
is going somewhere.

--Groucho Marx

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