



them. Last year there were four or five good documentaries wholly or in part about police brutality, race relations, and riots. This year there is at least that many. It was a topic that was very much in the news in 2017. If they were seen separately and months apart they would probably get high ratings. But it is hard to see three in a week and not down-rate them for being so similar and not have that affect my opinion.

Films are rated on a -4 to +4 scale.

#### MOLLY'S GAME

This film is based on a true story. Molly Bloom wanted to be an Olympic skier and came very close to making it. Then in an instant she had an accident, was washed out, and had to give up her Olympic dreams. By chance she ended up inheriting the job of organizing the most exclusive weekly poker game in the world. This task brought her some small fame and some major fortune in (honest) tips. MOLLY'S GAME is written and directed by Aaron Sorkin who wrote THE SOCIAL NETWORK, STEVE JOBS, MONEYBALL, and A FEW GOOD MEN. He also did much of the writing for "The West Wing". I will be honest that sports films are not my thing, and poker films are not my thing either. I started this film thinking it was not for me. It took five minutes before I became fascinated by this film and by Molly. Jessica Chastain is captivating as Molly Bloom and Idris Elba is her lawyer. When the two talk they are really convincing as being very, very smart. Much of the film revolves around the fact that Molly has very high scruples. The FBI did not believe that, but I do. This film was a lot of enjoyment and it may well be the most fun I will have at the movies this year. This is a major role for Chastain and I suspect that from now on she will be thought of as a glamorous actress. Rating: +3

#### THE POST

Set in 1971, the owner of the Washington Post is faced with a Constitutional issue of whether to publish the contents of the Pentagon papers or to allow the government to gag her newspaper. Meanwhile as the first woman ever to own a newspaper she gets little respect from her own staff. Steven Spielberg directs a good cast led by Meryl Streep and Tom Hanks. Hanks's character, Streep's editor-in-chief, is pushing for the newspaper to exercise the First Amendment right of the newspaper. But that way leads to a lot of trouble. Rating: +3

#### JANE

This biography of Jane Goodall shows us how by studying chimpanzees she has changed our definition of what is and is not human. We see her in-depth (and continuing) study of chimpanzee behavior. The film is a feast for the eye with its beautiful animal photography. Just how these images became part of the film is actually part of the story. This is certainly one of the year's best documentaries. Rating: +3

#### FIRST THEY KILLED MY FATHER

This is an epic yet personal story, a memoir of one very young girl. Loung Ung, survived in Cambodia when the violently militant Khmer Rouge controlled much of the populace. The narrative is just as vicious and painful as the title suggests it to be. Angelina Jolie directs from a script by she co-authored with the real Loung Ung. Rating: +3

#### DUNKIRK

With an unusual stylistic approach, Christopher Nolan writes and directs his re-creation of one of the most heroic retreats in history. 400,000 British soldiers had been fighting in Europe and now were surrounded by Germans, stranded on the beaches of near the French town of Dunkirk where they were vulnerable to attack from the land, sea, and air. At the same time as he is telling the story, Nolan does some strange experiments with cinematic time that the inattentive viewer (like me perhaps) might easily miss. Rating: +3

#### HAROLD AND LILLIAN: A HOLLYWOOD LOVE STORY

This is the story of the lives of a Hollywood couple, Lillian and Harold Michelson, who 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 astutely 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 perfect marriage. Their visual style and knowledge shaped the look and feel of surprisingly many classic films. This film was written, produced, and directed by Daniel Raim. Rating: low +3

#### BREATHE

This is based on a true story. Stricken with polio and a prognosis of only three months to live, Robin Cavendish must first overcome his death wish. He then attacks his problem that he must live in hospital with an immovable respirator. With the help of friends he engineers a way to live at home and then to actually move around. His engineering solutions improved the lives of thousands of polio victims. Andy Serkis's directorial debut is a moving paean to the human spirit and the possibilities of engineering. Rating: high +2

#### BLADE RUNNER 2049

After thirty-five years the classic science fiction film BLADE RUNNER gets a sequel directed by Denis Villeneuve and based on a screenplay by Hampton Fancher among others. The story concerns a search for the author of the false memories implanted in replicants. The film is a long 163 minutes starting at a contemplative (not to say "snail's") pace, yet is a little

overstuffed with action later in the second half. It is richer in ideas than is the original film, though it lacks the iconic visuals that that first film did so well. Rating: high +2

#### THE LIMEHOUSE GOLEM

A police detective stalks a serial killer in Victorian London and tries to connect it to a recent killing. The film feels as if it was dipped in "Victorian atmosphere concentrate." The movie takes itself very serious indeed, but the viewer can look between the lines to see it as something of a romp. Peter Ackroyd's 1994 novel DAN LENO AND THE LIMEHOUSE GOLEM is the basis of this dourly fun mystery with a popular London music hall as a background. Juan Carlos Medina directs a screen adaptation by Jane Goldman. The film features the never-fail actor Bill Nighy and Olivia Cooke. The mystery is perhaps not enough mysterious, but the acting and the look and feel are worth the trip. Incidentally, one disappointment is that the plot has virtually nothing to do with golems. Rating: high +2

#### TICKLING GIANTS

Dr. Bassem Youssef was a heart surgeon in Cairo who was fascinated by "The Daily Show" and its host Jon Stewart. He quit medicine and started his own satirical daily show, patterning himself after Stewart, but in a country where extremists can be deadly. This documentary, heavily laced with humor and satire, tells the story of Youssef and his send-up show(s) under three dangerous and autocratic presidents of Egypt. Rating: high +2

[-mrl]

#### Answers to the Puzzles from ALICE'S PUZZLES IN WONDERLAND (comments by Evelyn C. Leeper):

Last week I said that ALICE'S PUZZLES IN WONDERLAND by Richard Wolftrick Galland had two incorrect answers. Here are the puzzles with the answers given, and my analysis of why they are wrong.

The first is as follows: The Hatter finds a \$50 bill. He went to the butcher and pays him the \$50 he owed him. The butcher bought a pig from the farmer for \$50. The farmer paid the carpenter \$50 he owed him. The carpenter paid the King \$50 in taxes. The King paid the Hatter \$50 he owed him for a hat. Then the Hatter recognized the bill as the original \$50 bill and realized it was fake. What was lost in this and by whom?

The answer given is that all the transactions are invalid and everything is back the way it was, except that the butcher now owes the farmer \$50 for the pig. (Or presumably the butcher has to return the pig.) But why? Anyone who has read Eric Frank Russell's THE GREAT EXPLOSION realizes that this is just a way of making more concrete the idea of "transitive" debts: if I owe you \$50, you owe Fred \$50, and Fred owes me \$50, the simplest thing to do is just cancel all three debts. The \$50 bill just makes it clearer. So why say all the transactions are invalid? If the Hatter had never realized the bill was a fake, but had lost it instead, everything would be fine.

The other puzzle involves a shrinking potion and a growing potion. A witch has a quart iron cauldron of the growing potion and a quart bronze cauldron of the shrinking potion. She then takes three ladles of the stuff in the iron cauldron and poured them into the bronze cauldron, which she mixed thoroughly. Then she took two ladles from the bronze cauldron and put them in the iron cauldron, then a ladle from the iron to the bronze, and then two ladles from the iron to the bronze, mixing each time. Alice then asked which would make her shorter.

The answer given was "neither", the reasoning being that four ladles have gone in each direction, so the mixtures are the same. "What the growth portion has gained in shrinking potion is exactly what the shrinking potion has gained in growth potion, or else the amounts of liquids would differ." Well, the latter statement is true, but the real question is in which the shrink-stuff is more than the grow-stuff. Looking at an extreme example, if the cauldrons were 1000 gallons each and you moved 4 teaspoons from each cauldron to the other, the one that started out with 1000 gallons of shrink-stuff would still have a lot more shrink stuff than grow-stuff. [-ecl]

#### THE PIRATES OF SOMALIA (film review by Mark R. Leeper):

**CAPSULE:** This film is one of several of 2017 based on true stories. Jay Bahadur, a determined if somewhat unready writer from Toronto, decides that his path to fame and permanent employment is to travel to Somalia and write a book about the pirates who are in the news for hijacking passing cargo ships. This film covers his exploits getting to Somalia and mixing in affairs that he only incompletely understands. The film starts as a comedy, but the humor runs out as Bahadur comes to understand how serious his position is, and he learns to be responsible. The film was written and directed by Bryan Buckley, adapted from the book by Bahadur. Rating: high +1 (-4 to +4) or 6/10

Most people from the United States probably could not find Somalia on a world map. Over the last few decades the world has become aware of the massive problems of Somalis, in particular those who turn to maritime piracy. They hijack cargo ships in

the African waters and the Indian Ocean. Somali pirates seize cargo ships and hold the hostage for ransoms in the millions of dollars.

There have been at least two major films on this issue. Tom Hanks starred in CAPTAIN PHILLIPS, and there was an excellent Danish film, A HIJACKING. THE PIRATES OF SOMALIA is not as informative perhaps, with good but unsuccessful intentions telling the story of Jay Bahadur (played by Evan Peters), an aspiring journalist who had a special interest in Somalia after he wrote a term paper on the country for a high school class. Ignoring the danger, he travels to Somalia to see if he can find pirates.

Once he gets to know the Somalis he wants to write about them to tell the world what he has learned. But the emphasis is less about the country and more about Bahadur and the problems he faces--a fish out of water--than about any pirates. His greatest revelation is that other countries have over-fished Somalia's fishing waters. For the Somalis it is an issue of going hungry or finding another source of income. Those very valuable cargo ships on the water near home is a big temptation for them.

Al Pacino plays Seymour Tolbin, considered a great journalist made famous by his Vietnam coverage, who is sort of inspiration and muse for Bahadur. For his role Pacino slurs his speech talking through rough beard. He is not based on a real person and is a waste of valuable narrative time. There is one other familiar actor, Melanie Griffith plays Bahadur's mother at least a little better.

Scenes like a pirate attack on a boat are done in animation--a reasonable way to save on budget. The film does feature some well- shot desert photography. Otherwise the country looks uninviting and that too we see.

The worst problem of the film is there is much less about the pirates themselves as there is about how Bahadur found his way to them. Rather than a news correspondent story sort of film this film can more be compared with a film like LOCAL HERO with its gentle look at the ensemble of background characters. Even the pirates themselves indentify themselves as Robin Hood pirates, supposedly sharing their proceeds with the poor. Just as Laurel and Hardy accentuated each other by their opposite statures--one tall and thin, the other short and squat--Bahadur and his guide Abdi (Barkhad Abdi) have very different faces accentuating the humor between them. Bahadur (Evan Peters, really) has a very circular face. Barkhad Abdi has a narrow, triangular face. (Abdi was also in CAPTAIN PHILLIPS as the lead pirate.)

Writer-director Buckley seems to think that his viewer wants to know more about Bahadur than about Somali pirates. At least he can make that funnier. I rate THE PIRATES OF SOMALIA a high +1 on the -4 to +4 scale or 6/10. This film had a limited release in the US on December 8. A wider release is probably coming.

Film Credits: <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt5126922/reference>

What others are saying: [https://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/the\\_pirates\\_of\\_somalia\\_2017](https://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/the_pirates_of_somalia_2017)

[-mrl]

#### **ORPHAN BLACK (Season 5)** (television review by Dale Skran):

My family has just finished binge watching Season 5 of ORPHAN BLACK, so I think it is time for a final wrap-up of this excellent series, albeit a bit later than most critics. I was fearful that the final season would drift further into fantastic technology and anti-business/anti-technology sentiment, but was instead generally pleased with the result.

The plot of Season 5 revolves around the final "wizard behind the scenes"--Stephen McHattie as P. T. Westmorland ("Percival")--a supposedly 170-year-old man who is the brains behind Neolutionism, and his Dr. Moreau-like island. It should come as no surprise that the clones eventually overcome Westmorland's machinations, and he comes to a bad end at their hands. The big technologies on-screen include infusing young blood into the old to extend their lives, bionic eyes, and the lin28 gene which is related to healing and aging, all of which are ripped from recent headlines.

There is a really great party scene near the end where Felix presents several of the clones as human adjuncts to his art show. The audience believes that each clone is the same person in a different costume, but in the show they are different people. Of course, this is just another example of the acting virtuosity of Tatiana Maslany as Sarah Manning and all the other clones.

There are two things I don't like about Season 5. First, there seem to be about 6 episodes worth of plot, with the remaining four episodes padded out with flashbacks that aren't really needed, and a set of extended "final" scenes reminiscent of the ending of the "Lord of the Rings" movies. Second, even though the clones finally dump a huge trove of information on the Internet that destroys Neolutionism and Dyad, as well as many other related corporations, no one ever finds out about the 274 surviving Leda clones and they apparently continue their lives in secret. This is possible, but surely should have had some support in the plot, i.e. scenes where the clones ensure that the data dump does not mention the Leda project. Since Rachael eventually comes over to Sarah's side, it is certainly possible to have suppressed this information, but such actions are simply

not mentioned. This is just lazy writing.

Most of the plot threads brought up in the first four seasons tie off nicely, leaving just two things that are unexplained. First, just exactly how did Siobhan Sadler (Mrs. S) [Maria Doyle Kennedy] become who she is--a foster mother who seems to have an vast range of spy skills, a ruthless talent for violence, her own endless network of henchmen, and unlimited sage wisdom? There is an implication that she had something to do with the Irish Republican Army, but this seems a weak straw to lean on. Second, Kira's daughter Kira has two powers--fast healing, which is explained, and a loose telepathic connection with the clones, which is not explained. This connection is the one thing in the entire show that is not hard science, and it is not required to make the plot work in the slightest. I really wish it had just been left out entirely.

Overall, Orphan Black stands as a great hard SF series, probably one of the best ever. This is an "R-rated" cable TV show, with Game of Thrones level violence/sex, and the 5th season is no exception, so Orphan is only for adults and older teens, but a must-see for any serious SF fan. Additionally, Orphan Black serves an important educational purpose in helping the public to understand that there is nothing about clones per se that presents any danger to the world, and that clones are just people like the rest of us, except there are more of them!

Additional Note: The only objections to cloning I've see that have real substance is a fear of "clone dynasties." The idea is that rich/smart/capable people would create clones of themselves and pass on their fortunes to the clones, thus avoiding "deviation toward the mean" and the gradual decline of subsequent sexually created generations. This fear assumes that it is well understood how to raise a clone to be as capable as the original, something that seems far from obvious. It might well be that much like in THE BOYS FROM BRAZIL, a large number of clones would be needed to have a shot at replicating the original. Of course, if 10% of the clones are highly capable, the main result of this strategy might be a dynastic bloodbath/"clone war." Although there is some merit to these concerns, my suspicion is that the "clone dynasties" would be rapidly surpassed by those using pre-implantation genetic diagnosis and gene editing to improve each subsequent generation. [-dls]

#### **STAR WARS--THE LAST JEDI** (letter of comment by George MacLachlan):

In response to [Mark's review of STAR WARS--THE LAST JEDI](#) in the 12/22/17 issue of the MT VOID, George MacLachlan writes:

I just finished reading the latest MT VOID and wanted to thank you both for keeping this channel of communication and information sharing open. I have many fond memories of our SF club meetings back in the good old days at the Labs.

I'm still working at AT&T over in MT, but am thinking seriously of retiring and moving out to the West coast to be closer to our daughters.

Donna and I both agree heartily with Mark's review of the latest "Star Wars" movie. You do an outstanding job of getting to the essence of the film and capturing the relevant details. [-gfm]

Mark responds:

George, Evelyn and I are much pleased with your reactions. You pay us very high complement. Other than Evelyn and I, George is our only charter member remaining. [-mrl]

#### **THE FLIGHT OF THE PHOENIX** (letter of comment by Joseph T. Major):

In response to [Mark's comments on TCM movies for January](#) in the 12/29/17 issue of the MT VOID, Joseph Major writes:

THE FLIGHT OF THE PHOENIX has a moving dedication. I mean the book (1964): "There are certain men who, when faced with the choice of dying, or doing the impossible, elect to live. This story is written in honor of their kind."

The movie was dedicated to Paul Mantz, the stunt pilot and aviation mastermind, who died during the filming of a scene. [-jtm]

Mark responds:

It was not just a scene. It would have been the most dramatic scene of the film and one that makes itself obvious by its absence. [-mrl]

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

Spoiler warning: Spoilers out the wazoo!

THE THIRD MAN by Graham Greene (ISBN 978-0-140-28682-3) and its film version are on the face of it about the identity of the "third man", but they are also about the identities--the "true" identities--of other characters and entities as well. I will be discussing both the book and the film, and try to indicate which one I am discussing at a specific point.

The film (at least the British version) starts with the opening narration. The narrator says that he did not know "the old Vienna before the war, with its Strauss waltzes, its glamour and easy charm. Constantinople suited me better." This emphasizes that Vienna--its underlying identity--has changed. (In the book, it is "its Strauss waltzes and its bogus easy charm," suggesting that even before the war, Vienna put on a false face.) But this is also the first of many "mis-namings", because Constantinople was renamed Istanbul in the 18th century. It is true the name was not adopted immediately in the West, but by 1946 one can claim that Constantinople was no longer the correct name. (The book makes no mention of Constantinople.)

The most obvious identity issues are with the characters. The first and foremost is the identity of the third man seen by the porter at Harry Lime's accident. This is compounded by the confusion between Lime and the intern Joseph Harbin, who has been buried in what is supposedly Lime's grave.

In the novel, the main character is the Englishman Rollo Martins, who writes cheap Westerns under the pen name "Buck Dexter". This is not one issue of identity, but two, since he conceals both his true name and his true nationality. (We later discover he has never even been to America.) In the film, he is the American Holly Martins (played by Joseph Cotten, he would have to be American), and he writes under his own name.

In another error of geographical identity in the film, Sgt. Paine says he likes "The Lone Rider of Santa Fe" (which Holly Martins wrote), and has always wanted to see Texas. (In the book, the main character is "Rollo Martins", not "Holly".)

Martins almost always calls Major Calloway "Callaghan". In the film, it seems as though Martins knows Calloway's correct name (because he does use it some of the time, usually when talking about Calloway to a third person), but usually addresses him directly as "Major Callaghan" to annoy him. The first time (when Martins is drunk and so may be doing it accidentally), Calloway snaps back, "Calloway! I'm English, not Irish." However, in the novel, Martins appears to be genuinely unable to get Calloway's name straight at the beginning--Greene has him thinking "Callaghan" when we are inside Martins's thoughts--but later correctly addresses him as "Calloway".

Also in the novel, though Calloway is wearing a uniform (colonel rather than major), he says he is actually Scotland Yard. More identity confusion.

In the film, Crabbin (an organizer of cultural events) hears someone mention that Martins is a writer and assumes he is a literary type. In the novel, the confusion is more explicit. When Martins tries to check in to the hotel, he is told there is no reservation for Martins, but there is one for Dexter. He takes it, assuming it is for his pen name, but Crabbin, who is expecting the literary novelist \*Benjamin\* Dexter, overhears this and assumes this is he. Later, Martins finds himself again filling the role of Benjamin Dexter (at a lecture) and, in the book, signs Benjamin Dexter's novel as "B. Dexter", telling himself it is not really a lie.

In the film Martins mispronounces Dr. Winkle's name with a "W" sound at the beginning rather than the correct "V" sound. (This actually makes no sense, because Martins has \*heard\* the name, not \*seen\* it. For all he knows, it is spelled "Vinkle".) In the novel, he reads what someone has written, but pronounces it "Winkle" instead of "Winkler" (no indication of his initial consonant pronunciation). Here it is possible that the writing was not clear enough on the final letter.

In both the film and the book, Martins also adds to the identity confusion by saying that he has been influenced by "Grey", leading the literary-minded audience to ask, "What Grey? I do not know the name." "Zane Grey--I don't know any other." (Zane Grey's full name was "Pearl Zane Grey", so it is another example of a slightly concealed identity. After all, no one would buy Westerns written by an author named "Pearl".) However, the audience should at least have considered Thomas Gray and indeed, in the book Crabbin insists that Martins is joking and really meant "the poet Gray."

In another cultural referent, both the Brigadier and Paine call an earlier Hindu dance cultural event a "strip tease". (One could even see the adulteration of penicillin as a question of identity: passing one substance off as another.)

Anna calls Holly "Harry" at least twice in the film, not to taunt him (as Martins does with Callaghan/Calloway), but because she is so wrapped up in Harry Lime that his name comes out automatically instead of the very similar "Holly". When Martins corrects her the second time, she says that "Holly" is a silly name.

And of course, Anna's false papers are another form of identity confusion. Is "Anna Schmidt" really her name, or is that just the name on her papers? In the novel, Crabbin says, "She calls herself Schmidt," implying that is merely a stage name. Also, in the novel she is Hungarian, in the film she is Estonian, and "Schmidt" is neither a Hungarian nor an Estonian name. [-ecl]

Mark Leeper  
mleeper@optonline.net

Quote of the Week:

A really companionable and indispensable dog is an  
accident of nature. You can't get it by breeding for it,  
and you can't buy it with money. It just happens along.  
--E. B. White

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