

THE MARCH OF MIND

28 March My fear of a Liberal-National Coalition victory in the federal election on 13 March was not groundless — they went into the election all cock-a-doodle-hoop and party-hats, and everyone expected them to win — but a funny thing happened on the way to the poll. What it was exactly, no-one seems to know, but they lost the unlosable election. Labor is back for an unprecedented fifth consecutive term, and with an increased majority. 'This is the sweetest victory of all,' said Paul Keating late on election night, and it certainly is, especially for him. Changing leaders mid-term is a hazardous thing for a party in office, but Keating is now elected Prime Minister, justifying his deposing Bob Hawke in late 1991 (if justification were needed).

One of the most surprising things about the election, to me anyway, is that the idea of Australia becoming a republic never became an issue. When Keating said in his policy speech that he would get things moving in this direction I thought he was being perhaps a bit foolhardy. Now even contenders for leadership of the Liberal Party have said there is no reason why Australia should not be a republic, if that's what the people want.

Someone did a survey last week of what people know about our constitution and government, and the results weren't surprising: people don't know much at all. I wonder what the result would be if they were asked how much they *care* about such things. It seems that I care too much; I don't know why. I don't think of elec-

tions as football matches, but some of the kind people who tried to cheer me up during the election campaign must think of them that way: win a few, lose a few, it's only a game. One of the few things that Paul Keating and the Liberal leader, John Hewson, agreed on was that this was the most important federal election since 1949, even if they meant different things by that. I can only think that a significant number of people agreed with Keating that a Coalition victory would mean not just a change of government but a fundamental change in Australian society, and preferred to stay with the devil they know (or the game they understand).

The election seems to have had an immediate moderating effect on the Liberal Party, to judge by some of its MPs' statements. Last week John Howard and Alexander Downer were agreeing in principle (Howard reluctantly, Downer almost with enthusiasm) that Australia could become a republic. John Fahey, Liberal Premier of New South Wales, says a republic is inevitable. Hewson disagrees. Meantime the Liberals have re-elected Hewson leader, but elected as his deputy Michael Wooldridge, who in pre-Thatcher times might have been described as a small-l Liberal (but now must be called 'wet'). Hewson denounces the Keating government as 'socialist'; Wooldridge says it is no more socialist than he is, and it's time we stopped using such pejoratives. But for John Hewson I could almost think the Liberal Party is being undermined by creeping common sense.

CAHIERS DU BOÎTE-IDIOTE

Having a television set is bad enough, but having a VCR as well is positively wicked. When Sally and I bought a VCR six years ago — the best hi-fi model that least money could buy, as I said at the time, and indeed the Sharp VC793 has proved very reliable — I attempted for a while to justify possessing it by writing notes on every film I watched. I still have the notes I wrote on the 58 films I watched between 13 March and 9 May 1987. That average of one film a day was excessive, and I have since got it down to about three a week. I can tell you that because, after admitting last issue that I don't keep a diary, early in January I went out and bought one, and I have since kept a faithful record of the films I have watched. The idea was that in December I could join all those other people in ANZAPA who favor us with lists of their year's favorite things, but a little calculation suggests a list of 150-odd films, many of which I will have forgotten by then, and I may not be interested in typing a list anyway.

So, just to see how it goes, with no guarantee that I will either continue or desist in future issues, here is my list of films watched in 1993 so far. I will use a scale of 1 to 5; five stars generally means that I want to see the film again; fewer doesn't necessarily mean I don't.

Black Robe (Beresford, 1991) ** The publicity said it was better than *The Mission* and *Dances With Wolves*. It isn't. I found only one character engaging, the friendly Algonquin chief. The violence is unnecessarily explicit, the story unbelievably dull. The scenery is magnificent it accounts for most of the stars.

House of Games (Mamet, 1987) *** Rotten acting. Normally I wouldn't have persevered, but Bruce Gillespie recommended it. The stars are for the story, which is very clever.

The Bank Dick (Cline, 1940) *** I always enjoy watching W.C. Fields, and this is one of his I hadn't seen before, but I don't think I laughed once. The car chase I had seen before, and it's classic.

The Human Factor (Preminger, 1979) *** Considering its origin (a Graham Greene novel), screenplay (Tom Stoppard) and cast (including Nicol Williamson and Robert Morley), this is surprisingly dispassionate and unexciting.

The Seventh Seal (Bergman, 1957) ***** Timeless classic, as fascinating, strange and disturbing now as when I first saw it thirty years ago.

Sanshiro Sugata / Judo Saga 1 (Kurosawa, 1943) K**** His first film: it's amazing that it and its sequel have

survived. It's about traditional and emerging martial arts late last century, in this case jujutsu and judo. At the time I gave it five stars, but what would be left for *Seven Samurai*, *Dersu Uzala* and all the others? Some directors' films I will have to rate against each other, so K**** means better than **** but not as good as Kurosawa's best.

Sanshiro Sugata [part 2] / Judo Saga 2 (Kurosawa, 1945) K**** The story continues, as judo takes on boxing (neither art nor sport, but a brutal and bloody entertainment) and karate. In both films the spiritual dimension of the martial arts is presented as more important than individual physical prowess.

House of Cards (TV mini-series) ***** Ian Richardson is chillingly compelling as Urquhart, the man who would be prime minister. The violence in this story is mostly psychological, and far more disturbing than some physical violence I have seen on film. Despite the five stars, I'm not sure I could watch it a third time.

Red King, White Knight (Murphy, 1989) *** By the time I realized I had seen it before I was too hooked to stop, mainly because of Max von Sydow's presence, but the suspense was barely enough for two viewings.

The Chiltern Hundreds (AKA *The Amazing Mr Beecham*) (Carstairs, 1949) *** Script by William Douglas-Home, basically a drawing-room farce. Great pace, great one-liners, and no doubt a classic comedy, but I don't like drawing-room farces much (except Oscar Wilde's).

Playtime (Tati, 1968) T**** Controlled mayhem, brilliantly choreographed (especially the opening sequence), and as funny as anything of his that I have seen. (Has anyone ever seen *Parade* (1974)? It's painful to think that a Tati film exists that I haven't seen.) I can't separate the other four, though *Jour de Fête* remains my favorite, but *Playtime* falls just short of them, and for just one reason: it's too long. I have no idea what could be cut out, but I get a bit fidgety during the long restaurant sequence.

Pursued (Walsh, 1947) *** Unusual Western. The acting of the time makes it a bit tedious, but it was worth watching. Judith Anderson is excellent.

Ill Met By Moonlight (AKA *Night Ambush*) (Powell, 1956) *** Another BG recommendation. It has its moments, it seems nicely filmed, and I'm partial to Dirk Bogarde, but really, it's just another gung-ho adventure yarn, and chauvinist as all get out. Theodorakis's music is interesting: this must be a fairly early example of the campaign to make rembetika respectable (a campaign that succeeded eight years later when *Zorba* danced onto the screen). Thank God for the VCR: while I was watching this film, SBS was screening the next — my Film of the Year so far.

De Stille rond Christine M. / The Silence around Christine M. (AKA *A Question of Silence*) (Marleen Gorris, 1982) ***** I had never heard of Marleen Gorris, and from the preview in the *Green Guide* (the Melbourne Age's weekly guide to films on TV, which rated it film of the week) I expected to find this film difficult and uncomfortable:

It is arguably the finest moment in feminist film. English critic John Coleman lamented 'the film tries to catch males in a Catch-22 — to hell with it'. His colleague Phillip French called it 'inherently stupid — the unacceptable face of feminism' and

Milton Shulman decried the film for presenting 'an argument that would have justified the Nazis' extermination of the Jews, Herod's slaughter of babies and the lynching of blacks'.

Released over a decade ago and still largely confined to art-house audiences, this remarkably unsettling film is likely to confront every male who sees it. For the full effect, watch it with somebody of the opposite sex.

I didn't. I watched the tape a few nights later, after Sally had gone to bed. Did I miss the full effect? I think not. *The Silence around Christine M.* is a why-dun-it: why did three women who had never met, in full view of four other women, suddenly, coolly and without discussion, murder and mutilate the male proprietor of a boutique? From start to finish it is men who provide the answer; the women are reduced (or elevated) to laughter. I was enthralled. I found it clever, sad, very funny, and totally convincing. I don't know whether I laughed in all the right places, but I'm fairly sure I got the point. I'll let those who are qualified decide whether it is 'the finest moment in feminist film'; I have no doubt that it is a great humanist film.

The Fast Lady ** Very dated. James Robertson-Justice and the blown Bentley of the title made it just worth watching. Vroom, vroom.

Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade (Spielberg, 1989)

**** This is the way I like my gung-ho adventure yarns: non-stop action, good guys who never take themselves seriously, moments of high comedy, an absurd plot made palatable by these things — and, preferably, with Sean Connery (Yes, I even liked *Highlander*). Add Denholm Elliott and Alexei Sayle, and I am content. I liked this more than *Raiders of the Lost Ark* and *The Temple of Doom*. Favorite scene: at the grand Nazi book-burning, when Hitler autographs Indy's book.

The Party (Edwards, 1968) *** I'm sorry, but it's true. *The Party* is a classic, a masterpiece of visual comedy, and everyone should see it at least once, but it becomes just a bit tedious on the fourth or fifth viewing. You even start thinking that Hrundi Bhakshi's gentle indignation on seeing the graffiti-covered elephant — the symbol of his country, desecrated — might just apply to Peter Sellers' Hrundi Bhakshi.

Desperate Moment (Compton-Bennett, 1953) ***** A slightly younger Dirk Bogarde, a much more engaging story than *Ill Met By Moonlight*.

Inspector Morse: Driven to Distraction ** In a week that offered *Broken Mirrors*, *Jour de Fête* and *The Shop on Main Street*, the *Green Guide* selected *Black Narcissus* as its film of the week. Maybe I should have taped it, but Sally and I weren't in the mood for a 1947 film about sexually frustrated nuns in the Himalayas, not even a color film with Deborah Kerr, and offhand I don't know when I would be in that mood, so we watched John Thaw persecuting the wrong murder suspect. *Inspector Morse* is one of the better series on TV at the moment, but with its slow exposition and concern with character it is utterly wasted on a commercial channel.

Gebroken Spiegels / Broken Mirrors (Gorris, 1984)

***** Gorris's second film is set in a brothel. The main story is about the relationships between the women; there's a connected story about a truly revolting psychotic who kills women. There are more men than women in the film, and the only good man you never

see. Henriette Tol, an excellent actor, one of the three murderers in *The Silence around Christine M.*, plays the central character in this film, strong but vulnerable, playful, wise, ambiguous in her potent sexuality. The title of the film is ironic (damning is perhaps a better word): mirrors are literally and most dramatically broken in the story, but it is the women who are the metaphorical broken mirrors. Work it out for yourself. What amazes me about Marleen Gorris is her ability to make me identify with her female characters. Perhaps it has to do with my perception (I was about to say 'the fact', but it may be a fact only to me) that her women tend not to be feminists in any conventional or male-defined sense, but just women. Gorris is unrelenting in her portrayal of women as victims in a male-dominated society, but her men are equally victims. One of the most shocking moments in this film is when a man, a bystander who has helped an injured prostitute and is thanked for it, says 'I would do the same for a dog.' He certainly doesn't see himself as a victim of a male-dominated society. Neither, presumably, does the woman who makes sure we don't see the only good man in the film. But we see these people, all of the people, through Gorris's eyes. That, I think, is her achievement. Achievement? It's her job: it's what directors are supposed to do. But what eyes she has! *The French Connection* (Friedkin, 1971) *** Probably the wrong film to watch the night after *Broken Mirrors*,

but what do you listen to after Mahler's Second, or (perhaps more appropriate) *Duke Bluebeard's Castle*? I like Gene Hackman a lot, and his Popeye Doyle is certainly a memorable if unlovable character, but I didn't find this film particularly exciting, or particularly anything. *The President* (Hyams, 1988) **** Is it just Sean Connery that made this a much more enjoyable film for me than *The French Connection*? I don't think so. The story takes a while to get going, but in doing so establishes some engaging characters.

Jour de Fête (Tati, 1948) T**** SBS has found a good print, and subtitled it. I have watched *Jour de Fête* so often that it's slightly unsettling to know what's being said in the fairly rare patches of dialogue. Next time round I'll probably watch this print again, ignoring the subtitles. If that doesn't work I'll return to the slightly murky original. I don't have this problem with *Monsieur Hulot's Holiday*: the version shown last year on SBS is far superior to the shambles I, um, borrowed for private viewing from the ABC two or three years ago.

And that's it to the end of February. Leanne Frahm may be interested to know that this household has given up watching *Sale of the Century* in favor of *Jeopardy*. Tony Barber can be a pain: at times he is grossly insensitive, and his mispronunciations annoy me; but in *Jeopardy* you get 61 questions to answer, which is better value than the *Sale*, and the questions are a bit more interesting.

GELDING THE LILY

Some notes on FAPA mailing 221

OFFICIALDOM I have not checked the contents of the mailing against the list in *The Fantasy Amateur*. Does this mean that I Am Not A True Fapan? (No, I can hear John Foyster saying, that doesn't.)

ARNIE KATZ Congratulations on your elevation to the presidency — and your more-than-presidential example to the members: every second contribution to the mailing seems to have your name on it. Quantity is of no importance if quality is missing (there must be a better way of saying that), but you give us quality in abundance. *The Gist of the MAGIcon* (Folly 18) is a rotten pun, but if you had called this convention report 'A Gift from a Magus' (which it is) some readers might have felt a certain touch of self-promotion about it, so I forgive you. It is the best convention report I have ever read (or if it is not, I forget what is), and the best extended piece of fannish writing I have read in many years. To read it in its first edition, just as it came, twentieth in a stack of fifty apazines, was a proud-and-lonely experience, Arnie. Just as well I was alone when I read it: I was laughing my head off most of the time. Even so, I was unprepared for the Ghoddminton sequence, which is pure fannish magic — a marvellous tribute to the High Fen of Belfast, and a flight of fantasy that compares with the Dublin range-war in Flann O'Brien's *At Swim-Two-Birds* (than which I can offer no higher praise).

Since it is Jack Speer's jurisdiction, not mine, to comment in FAPA on misspelling and other linguistic offences, I will say only that *The Gist of the MAGIcon* is pretty damn sloppy, Arnie, and I don't believe your

presidential partner proofread it at all. No, I won't say only that: I will return to the head of these comments and call them 'Gelding the Lily', putting one of your more amusing typos where everyone can see it, and let that be a lesson to you.

To give my readers who do not have the privilege of being yours a sample of your writing, and a glimpse of a friend who is sadly missed, I would like to quote a brief passage from page 20 May 1? Thank you.

The Fanzine Lounge was the crossroads of the fan universe. Several times I found a comfortable seat, sat back, and let the fanworld parade past my station, with excellent results.

That's how I met DUFF winner Roger Weddall for the first time. Roger seemed a fine representative of his fandom, and I made sure Joyce gave him a sample *Folly* and added his name to the mailing list. I'd have liked to chat a bit longer, but he was on a Mission and could not be diverted from his quest.

'I'm hunting for Sheryl Birkhead,' he said.

'Well, as long as you eat what you catch,' I responded.

JANICE EISEN I made a note to ask you something about Schenectady, then found Lloyd Penney (in Eric Lindsay's *Gegenschein*) making the matter even more curious. When Vonda McIntyre was in Adelaide in 1977 I took her to be interviewed on a radio show, and on the way she said something like 'When people ask me where I get my ideas from, I tell them "Schenectady".' Now here is a Canadian fan saying 'I get my strange ideas from a mail-order house in Schenectady.' Is this a standard joke? I don't recall seeing it in a fanzine before (someone else's fanzine, I mean).

ARTHUR D. HLA VATY Daphne is a good name for a gerbil, so long as it really is a gerbil and not a boybl, and I am pleased for you that she is fannish ('sleeps most of the time, and when she's awake, she craps up her environment with paper'). :: 'A good concom is not noticed': I read that as 'condom' and marvelled at the aphorism :: 'Back-slash recursive fiction' is a nice conceit I liked 'the sequel to *The Mote in God's Eye* [would be] *The Goblin in God's Nose*'.

ANDREW HOOPER *Northern Exposure* is my favorite TV show, the freshest I've seen since *Hill Street Blues* and *Cheers* came along. There's a touch of *Prairie Home Companion* about it, and like that show it has an uncommon, very adult, wholesomeness. Last week we had the episode with the unknown dead man, which was very moving, and Holling's circumcision (which was very painful, until he decided not to go ahead with it). The dream sequences work. The normality of the Indians works, and so does their *otherness* (as in the beautiful episode where Ed wants to know about his father). I'm fascinated to learn from you that it's shot in Roslyn, so close to Seattle, but I realize that it would be difficult to film in Cicely, Alaska. Don't tell me there's no such place, Andrew: Cicely is as real and teeming with life as Lake Wobegon.

RUSS CHATVIVNET Your chess opponent in 1941 was in the same league as Wynne Whiteford. Wynne and I used to play chess in our lunch and dinner breaks at the Northcote *Leader*, and the only games I won were those he resigned. 'Hah! You've got me in three moves, John!' 'Have I?' 'Yes, look . . . 'Gee, Wynne, you've really got me worked out.' :: What are the chances against two Fapans liking the *Jerusalem Bible* and saying so in the same mailing? :: Is it true that you invented the word 'fanzine'? I think we should get up a protest to Oxford University Press: the word has been dropped from the eighth edition of the *Concise Oxford Dictionary* (1990).

NORM METCALF 'I knew L. Ron Hubbard when he was a *small-time crook*' (p. 233). A nice story, Norm. I like this too (p. 235): 'Indeed, H K. Fly was a minor publisher'. :: Thanks for keeping track of consistency between listed and actual contents of mailings. It's a diabolical job, but you've got what it takes for it.

JIM CAUGHNAN 'the juveniles of the fifties had a lot that appealed to me': I had to reread the sentence to realize that you were talking about Heinlein's children's books. I have been so brainwashed by children's-book editors and enthusiasts in recent years that I didn't understand the word 'juveniles' in that context. When I was a bookseller we called them juveniles, juvenes, kiddylit, and I am sure I have said so, perhaps as recently as 1978, in the company of their editors. This may explain why I have never been asked to edit a children's book. :: 'Does anyone do long division with pencil and paper these days?' If I can't do it in my head, yes. It's faster than looking for my calculator.

RAY SCHAEFFER This is compulsively readable, Ray. You are making things hard for Judge Speer, mind: he'll have his work cut out with you and Arnie in this mailing. :: 'Blythe was the place . . . which more properly the town should be called BLIGHT' is, if I'm not mistaken, what Ursula Le Guin calls an 'East Coast which'. I call it an art form. :: And jeez, you really know how to end a

fanzine! I turned the last page, expecting a continuation of your remarks on crop circles — and there's nothing on the back at all. So is it songbirds or whales that make the circles?

DICK ENFY 'On the other hand, unless interstellar flight is really as cheap as bicycling down to the grocery store, I can't imagine the flying saucer people having nothing better to do with their time than vandalize innocent fields of grain.' Did you know about the songbirds and the whales, Dick? It's a puzzle, it really is. :: Are you an Old Pavonian, sir? I don't know what 'squib' you refer to in your note to Foyster, but I do know about the Steam Intellect Society. In a journal called *Philosophical Gas*, which has often mentioned the March of Mind and the Steam Intellect Society, it seems odd that I have not quoted the following sentences (just two, neither as long as some I have quoted) before now.

'God bless my soul, sir!' exclaimed the Reverend Doctor Folliott, hurrying one fine May morning, into the breakfast-room at Crotchiet Castle, 'I am out of all patience with this march of mind. Here has my house been nearly burned down, by my cook taking it into her head to study hydrostatics, in a sixpenny tract, published by the Steam Intellect Society, and written by a learned friend who is for doing all the world's business as well as his own, and is equally well qualified to handle every branch of human knowledge.'

Peacock, *Crotchiet Castle*, ch. 2

MARCI MCDOWELL 'Marsupial-wielding thugs are walking the streets, flaunting their opossums.' 'Why, Darth, is that a platypus you've got under your cloak or are you just happy to see me?' This is great stuff, Marci. I have always admired the ability of some humorists (notably Flann O'Brien, and in Australia Lennie Lower) to take a news item and extrapolate from it a series of absurdities each funnier than the last. You have the knack. :: Not criticism, just an observation: it is good form to spell (Australian) Aboriginal/Aborigines with a capital A.

SOMEONE IN THIS MAILING (I neglected to make a note, and I don't have the energy to retrace my eyetracks through 493 pages) tells us what happens if you play a country-&-western record backwards: you get your sweetheart back, and your house, and your dog, and your car, and . . . Whoever that was, thank you. From the reaction I've had to it, the joke seems new to Melbourne.

I was about to say that this is the second edition of this issue, but in fact it is only the most drastically edited version. The eight pages that it ran to as recently as this afternoon I can't afford to print. On two of the pages held over there is a powerful piece called 'Footballs in the Sands of Time', which I have offered to the *Age*, but I haven't heard from them, probably because they think it's about sport, and they have plenty of sports writers. Bruce Gillespie thinks it's about sport. I'm not sure what it's about, but there are some good jokes in it, and the *Age* could do with those. Lord willing and weather permitting, I will be making my first paid appearance in that newspaper on 3 April, pretending to review a book. I am pleased they sent me a galley proof: my author is fond of the expression *Soit!*, and I feared the worst.

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