

35 and Bethany) is free to do so. Just look for us there. (If you don't know what we look like, we can probably provide a description. I will be the handsome bearded fellow in the bomber jacket; Evelyn will be wrestling a blue down jacket.) [-mrl]

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2. Some quick film news for those who follow such things. Hollywood has discovered that if you have a good thing going you should not mess with it. Sequels planned for the upcoming year include a film to trade-off the success of the art house film WITTGENSTEIN. A further film about the great German philosopher will be called THE BRIDE OF WITTGENSTEIN. Continuing to add class to the film program, "Oedipus Rex" will be reworked as a sequel to GETTING EVEN WITH DAD. The new film will be called GETTING ODD WITH MOTHER. After the success of DRAGON, a biography of Bruce Lee, Paramount plans to do the Leonard Nimoy story with strong emphasis on his Star Trek work. The title is to be THE BEST EARS OF OUR LIVES. Ted Turner is planning GETTYSBURG II, THE BATTLE CONTINUES. Evelyn tells me she has seen reports of a sequel to ROMAN HOLIDAY called VISIGOTH HOLIDAY. Brad Pitt has been signed for LEGENDS OF THE WINTER. But the big news is that Steven Spielberg will bring together his two big successes of 1993 into a stunning double sequel entitled SCHINDLER SAVES THE DINOSAURS. [-mrl]

3. TWO CROWNS FOR AMERICA by Katherine Kurtz (Bantam Spectra, ISBN 0-553-07562-4, 1996, 384pp, US\$22.95) (a book review by Evelyn C. Leeper):

Though at first glance this may appear to be an alternate history, it is more accurately termed a secret history--that is, the events in it are not inconsistent with our present, but are not known in our history. For example, a novel in which John Wilkes Booth was really an agent of the Knights Templar would be a secret history.

In TWO CROWNS FOR AMERICA, the United States is just breaking away from England. But the spirit of democracy is not universal, even among the secessionists. Some want Charles Edward Stuart to assume the throne of the new country. Others think a home-grown king would be better and want General Washington to become King. But more central than these two factions are the machinations of the Freemasons, which form the core of the novel.

If you are interested in the details of the ceremonies of the Freemasons, this book may be for you. If you're a Revolutionary War buff, it will also have some appeal. However, if you're neither--and I fall into this category--you will probably find much of this book boring. Also, I found aspects of the basic premise in TWO CROWNS FOR AMERICA very contrived and not entirely believable. Whatever the actual role of women in 18th Century Freemasonry, the situation in this novel seemed constructed more as a feminist statement than a likely occurrence. (I was reminded of ROBIN HOOD,

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PRINCE OF THIEVES, which seemed determined to have a Black main character no matter how much it flew in the face of historical reality.) And while it's possible that there were (or are) Jews in the Freemasons, the heavily Christian basis of Freemasonry as described in the book would seem to argue against this.

As I said, I believe that there is an audience for this novel, but it requires a special interest or knowledge of the subject matter. For the average reader, I cannot recommend it. [-ecl]

4. DRACULA: DEAD AND LOVING IT (a film review by Mark R. Leeper):

Capsule: DRACULA: DEAD AND LOVING IT may be marginally better than the other films we have seen from Mel Brooks in a decade, but he is trying too hard to imitate the Zucker Brothers rather than to write in the style of THE PRODUCERS and THE TWELVE CHAIRS. Too many of his gags fall embarrassingly flat and he is not

bothering to create characters the way he did in his early comedies. This is a film that frequently shows visual style and keeps promising to be something, but in the end it did not care to deliver more than gags. A few of the gags work. Rating: high 0 (-4 to +4)

It is faint praise, but DRACULA: DEAD AND LOVING IT is the best Mel Brooks comedy in quite a long while. And for once he made a film that without the humor might have been above average. But some of the nice visuals are just wasted here and the film remains only a very mediocre effort with humor that is just too weak and mechanical to carry the film. The enema jokes and other unfunny run-on gags spoil the few funny bits in this satire of three different film adaptations of DRACULA.

At one time Mel Brooks was a really good filmmaker with genuine characters and a great sense of humor. Consider the skill with which he balanced personality with humor in THE PRODUCERS or the too-rarely-seen TWELVE CHAIRS. We have not seen much of that Mel Brooks in quite a while. Brooks's humor these days leans to cheap and easy gags, scatological or just lame far too often. And the weak humor sabotages not only his own production values, but his better gags as well. DRACULA: DEAD AND LOVING IT is no YOUNG FRANKENSTEIN, but it has a nice visual sense and many of its jokes really are funny. But Brooks needs to get a better idea of which gags work and which fall flat. In the end this new film has too many jokes to work as a horror film and too high a percentage of lame jokes for it to work as a comedy.

DRACULA: DEAD AND LOVING IT is basically a reworking of the 1931 screen version, itself a reworking of the John L. Balderston and Hamilton Deane play. That play, is a perennial favorite on the stage and formed the basis of the 1931 Bela Lugosi and the 1979 Frank Langella versions of DRACULA. The Brooks film then recreates and satirizes scenes from the Lugosi, the 1958 Christopher Lee DRACULA (U.S. title: THE HORROR OF DRACULA), and the 1992 Gary Oldman BRAM STOKER'S DRACULA. There is even a quick nod to the 1921 NOSFERATU. There is a nice recreation of the stairway and web sequence from the 1931 version and a beautiful recreation of the

staging of Lucy from the 1958 version, even matching the odd color values. It is in these two scenes that the film has its best moments. There are times when the photography has an exaggerated dreamlike quality that really does work. And the opening which takes us through famous graphic portrayals of vampires is done with a great deal of style. Unfortunately, these good moments get lost in the film.

By far not the smallest fault in the film is the transparent casting of Leslie Nielson as Dracula. Nielson's forte is playing characters who are overly obvious like big children, while a quality of mystery and otherworldliness is necessary to play the famous vampire, even in a comedy. He is cast against type, and he plays against type. If that was a gamble, it fails miserably, but more likely he is in the film because of his associations with other films. Harvey Korman as Dr. Seward has more than a little Nigel Bruce in his performance.

Brooks's writing has turned formulaic and that is slow death in comedy. He fills time in the film with pointless run-on gags that do not seem to get any funnier with the repetition. One of the run-on gags only reaches its real point at the end of the credit sequence when it plays mostly to empty seats--another example of where Brooks misjudges his audience. Too many of his jokes just end up a reference to urine or feces as if that by itself is funny. Also overused are pratfalls.

It is a sad state when all the best aspects of a Mel Brooks comedy have little to do with the humor. Brooks should take a look at what made some of his early films so good and refresh his memory on the difference between humor and gags. The style of the film, perhaps contributed by a good cinematographer, brings this one up to a high 0 on the -4 to +4 scale. [-mrl]

5. MR. HOLLAND'S OPUS (a film review by Mark R. Leeper):

Capsule: This is a GOODBYE, MR. CHIPS for the 1990s. Richard Dreyfus plays a would-be

composer and musician who turns music teacher and inspires generations of students. This is a more than usually realistic view of the teaching career that blows its credibility in the last ten minutes. Rating: low +2 (-4 to +4)

I greatly respect for the teaching profession, though I cannot say the same of all films made about teaching. We see a lot of films about the teaching profession and with a few notable exceptions (much notably THE PRIME OF MISS JEAN BRODIE), they generally make the teacher a hero. Teacher-hero stories fall into two different categories. One is the "flashbulb" sort of story, the other is the "candle." Flashbulb teacher films generally cover one semester. They have a new teacher come in and be faced with a nearly impossible situation. Either the students are totally establishment thinkers, the classroom is in total anarchy, or the students are treated by school officials as if they have the intelligence of water fowl. The teacher comes in, bringing with him or her the word that there is a world out there of knowledge and culture. Then in one quick semester the new erudition transforms the lives of the students. Example of this sort of film include DEAD POETS SOCIETY, RENAISSANCE MAN, TO SIR WITH LOVE, and STAND AND DELIVER. The teacher has brought enlightenment in one quick flash. This is rarely how the teaching profession operates.

Not as common, because they are generally less dramatic, are the films in which the teacher deals with many classes of students over a long period of time. This sort of film is much more realistic. Rather than as a flash of enlightenment, the teacher has been there as a source of culture for generations of students and, like the candle, the more that is given the less there is left for the teacher himself. Often the teacher has wondered if it has all mattered or not and his or her efforts have made a difference. But in the end the teacher who may even consider himself or herself as a failure comes to realize the deep respect that the effort has brought. This sort of film is a little more realistic. It includes GOODBYE, MR. CHIPS; GOOD MORNING, MISS DOVE; and the latest along these lines, MR. HOLLAND'S OPUS. In 1964 Richard Dreyfuss is a young musician and would-be composer who, in order to keep food on the table, takes a job as the high school music teacher of the newly-renamed John F. Kennedy High School. He finds the faculty unfriendly and unwelcoming and the students completely indifferent to the history of music. The school band makes a noise about as pleasant as the sound of a dentist's drill. He also has to admit his teaching is uninspired and unsuccessful. Eventually Holland decides that if his students cannot relate to Bach, he should try rock and roll and from there slowly he makes headway. The film follows Mr. Holland's life in and out of school. What he first thought of as a temporary teaching job that would give him the leisure to compose his own music instead soaks up all of his

time for more than three decades of his life. He is able to overcome most obstacles by being well-meaning and being willing to put in the effort. The film concentrates on Holland's relationship with his wife, with his deaf son, with the buzz-cut assistant principal (William H. Macy), with legions of talentless students and one very talented singer, and especially with himself and his dream of composing. The story of his career for more than three decades of teaching are shown in about two and a half hours as a diverse and diffuse mosaic. Some of the scenes are overly emotional, but for the most part the film retains an air of authenticity until the last ten minutes. The film tries too hard to have a big finish and spoils much of its credibility.

Dreyfuss is an accomplished actor, but a lot of accomplished actors have played teachers. However, one thing that set Dreyfuss apart is that he really looked like a high school teacher. Instead of handsome and dynamic, he looks very average, the model of what viewers will remember their teachers looked like. Because there are a lot of different relationships in this film, we see considerably less of any of the other characters. Glenne Headly is believable but not memorable as the long suffering Mrs. Holland who only occasionally shows a resentment that her husband allows himself to be consumed by his job. The film was written by Patrick Duncan, who wrote and directed 84 CHARLIE MOPIC and wrote A HOME OF OUR OWN. Director Stephen Herek seems to have learned a lot about how schools run since he directed BILL AND TED'S EXCELLENT ADVENTURE. More recently he directed THE MIGHTY DUCKS and THE THREE MUSKETEERS. The film is a little on the manipulative side, but it should be an audience pleaser. I give it a low +2 on the -4 to +4 scale. [-mrl]

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Patriotism is often an arbitrary veneration of real estate
above principles.

--George Jean Nathan

